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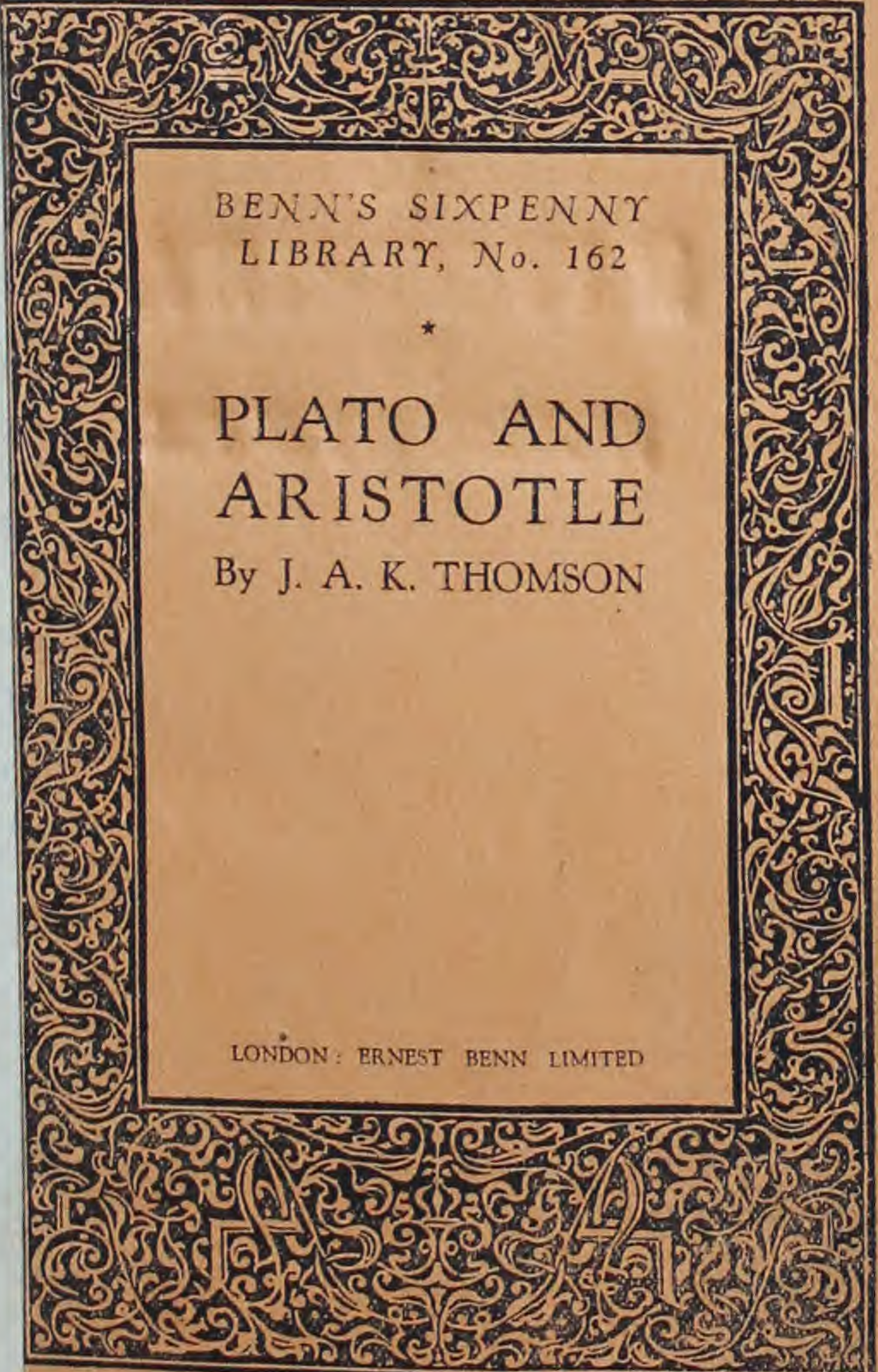
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# PLATO & ARISTOTLE

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THIS volume aims at nothing more than stating in plain language what ordinary people, neither Greek scholars nor philosophers, can get from Plato and Aristotle. They must get it for themselves, the writer conceiving his business to be necessarily that of introducer only. He is the more willing to do this from a conviction that to write of Platonism and Aristotelianism in a kind of abstraction from Plato and Aristotle is as unilluminating as it is tiresome. Both were very human people and the philosophy of each is quite exceptionally "drenched in matter." The only way to understand it is to understand them.

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# PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

## PLATO

### LIFE

PLATO was born at Athens in the year before Christ 428-7. (The Athenian year began and ended in different months from ours.) The Peloponnesian War, which was the turning point in the history of Athens, had already been in progress some three or four years; it lasted with growing terror and suffering for another twenty-six or twenty-seven. So Plato's whole youth was spent in it. Towards its close he would be called on to do military service. He had to watch his city slowly dashing herself to pieces on the rocks. He had to live through the final agony when she was starved into surrender. He had been forced to witness what to him must have been at least as painful as the mere bitterness of defeat—the steady deterioration of the Athenian spirit. What that spirit had been is mirrored in the funeral oration of Pericles, as reported by Thucydides, the loftiest utterance of ancient eloquence. The claim there made that Athens thought more of wisdom and beauty than other cities was not the whole truth, but it was true. It is because the claim was true that we still remember Athens. The evidence is that Plato's family, one of the oldest and most distinguished in Attica, had been of Pericles' way of thinking. The lad was brought up in an atmosphere of democratic idealism, not unlike that in which Wordsworth and, later, Shelley grew up, but more intellectual and scientific. Pericles, who established the greatness of Athens, was ready to maintain—and the best of his contemporaries agreed with



him—that the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the pursuit of truth and beauty, was, in the ugly modern phrase, sound practical politics. Plato never forgot that. His complaint in after years was that Pericles forgot it.

In the early years of the war Pericles died. His chief successor was called Cleon, a man able and disinterested, but a man of one idea. It was this which in time of war gave him his influence, for his one idea was force to the uttermost. Anyone who doubted the wisdom of this policy he branded as a defeatist. The worst of it was that he had not *only* the war mind, he had the class-war mind. The old, well-to-do, educated families, of which Pericles had been a member, he, no doubt honestly, felt to be traitors to the democracy and secret friends of Sparta; for anything like an effort to understand the enemy's point of view he hated instinctively. He was killed in battle, but his spirit lived. The Athenians became more and more intolerant. They would not listen to unpleasant truths. Moderate counsels were rejected as enfeebling the will to win. The old Euripides, who had spent his life teaching the power of sympathy, went off to die in Macedonia, "nearly everybody"—but not Plato, we may be sure—"feeling delighted about it." Athens flung all her ideals to the war to win it; and did not win it.

We, who stand so far away from the events, can see that the ideals themselves, though for the time defeated, did not die, and were later to inspire some of the greatest deeds of humanity. But the young Plato, immersed in the events, could not foresee that. His writings, dramatic as they are and never necessarily expressing his own opinion on any matter, are full of the emotion of this time. It is, when one comes to think of it, remarkable that a philosophical writer should continue till the end of his life to project his discussions into a past which was as different from his



present as we are from the Victorians. Incidentally, it paved the way for the historical novel, but we need not go into that. There was plenty of good reasons why Plato should put the real or imaginary dates of his Dialogues where he did; one great reason being that Socrates is normally their hero. But the preoccupation with Socrates and the problems of that earlier time is obvious. Equally obvious is the strong feeling that democracy had failed. Even Pericles is assailed. He and the other leaders of the people, he makes Socrates say in the *Gorgias*, "have filled the city with docks and harbours and walls and tributes and such trash, but not with temperance and justice." That is no doubt a one-sided indictment, but it shows what had been expected of Athens and her statesmen. The expectation had been shattered. There is no use now in calling it too highly pitched; the loftier it was, the heavier the fall.

At some time in his early life—we are not told when, but it is quite likely to have been in his boyhood—Plato met the most singular man in Athens. Socrates appears to have been an old friend of the family and, if so, he would certainly not overlook a lad like Plato. On the other hand, no one ever met Socrates for five minutes who did not remember him till the end of his life. You could not help noticing Socrates—a short, stiff-legged, stocky figure topped by a head of fascinating ugliness, whose chief features were a bald, bulging forehead, a snub nose and protruding eyes. There was evidently magic in the eyes, they held people so; and he increased their effect by looking at you from beneath his eyebrows in a humorous, quizzical way. But the true fascination of Socrates lay in the contrast between the Silenus-like exterior of the man and the pure and daring soul that shone through it. He was, of course, immensely intellectual and the most effective of controversialists, but to this he added a quality which his contemporaries



called irony. He might be called a saint with a sense of humour, if one remembers that he was a Greek saint and believed that the Kingdom of Heaven comes by thinking rightly more than by feeling strongly. Whatever may be thought of his importance as a philosopher—he left no book behind him and it is hard to know exactly what he taught—Socrates has impressed his personality on the world more perhaps than any other man in history. No other character seems quite so vivid and original. He owes this chiefly, though not entirely, to Plato. That was his good fortune, but it was also the good fortune of Plato to fall in with such a man.

Socrates was put to death by the Athenian democracy. That was due to a tragic misunderstanding more than to anything else; but the thing was done. A little before, Plato's family had involved itself in anti-democratic intrigues and had been decimated by the public executioner. There are some who write as if philosophers were influenced only by other philosophers. This is excessively not the case, and we need not pretend that Plato was not shaken out of all equanimity by the death of his relatives. Yet very likely the death of Socrates shook him more. For the old man had never cherished any political ambitions. His life had been dedicated to the things of the mind, and now because he had told the politicians to their faces what he thought of them the politicians had murdered him. Plato's intention, we are told, had been to enter politics. Well, here was what happened to the good man in politics. He never forgot that lesson. To the end of his long life, as one can see from his writings, it was never far from his thoughts.

No doubt he would have been a philosopher whatever happened. But if his hopes had matured, he would not have been a philosopher merely. For long this was too much forgotten. He was made the type of all thinkers who concern themselves with the supra-



mundane, with Utopias and what people vaguely call "ideals." Though there is much truth in it, yet this view is, on the whole, extremely misleading. Plato is in many ways the most practical of all philosophers. He is always prepared to work out to its least detail a working model of his principles. His longest Dialogue, the *Laws*, is the complete draft of a constitution, indeed of a whole political, social, and educational system in full working order. The *Republic* describes the state as it ought to be rather than as it can be on earth; yet Plato would have us understand that with sufficient goodwill such a state might be realised in great part here and now. It was the duty of the philosopher, he believed, to give such aid as he alone could give his fellow-countrymen in the management of their affairs. He must sometimes "go down into the cave" where the others are sitting in a twilight of shadows and half-truths, and tell them what he has seen in the clear light of reality. He must expect to be misunderstood. The man-in-the-street will never believe that anyone so unworldly can offer him any practical advice worth having. It is probable that Plato himself suffered a good deal from this kind of criticism. There is a wonderful passage in the *Theætetus* which tells how the wise man is mocked because, while his mind holds converse with the heavens, he does not see what is happening under his nose. No doubt the philosopher has his revenge afterwards when, on any question which calls for the power to distinguish the true from the false, the "practical business man" tumbles into error as ludicrously as the astronomer into wells; but meanwhile he must steel himself against ridicule and misconception.

Holding such a view, Plato could not and did not withhold his services as political adviser to any community which honestly desired them. The chief call of this nature came to him from Sicily. That island, or the Greek part of it, had been more or less unified



under the strong rule of the first Dionysius, the "tyrant" of Syracuse. His heir, who was also named Dionysius, was supposed to be "interested in philosophy," and when the old despot died Plato was invited to put his theories into practice at the new court. He had been in Sicily before and had no pleasant memories of it, but he obeyed what he thought the call of duty. However, the experiment was doomed to failure from the first. It was one of Plato's deepest convictions that the art of government, as the most difficult of all arts, required the longest and hardest study on the part of the future governor. He did not think that a gift for public speaking or a talent for bargaining or a good parliamentary manner was sufficient equipment for a statesman. Young Dionysius found himself condemned to study geometry when he had hoped to get on almost at once to constitution building. He seems to have been a fairly amiable and intelligent if rather worthless young man, and it is possible to sympathise with him. But Plato could not stultify himself either. The result was that the situation got more and more strained, and Plato at last sailed home. Perhaps he had expected no better issue, but such things hurt a man all the same.

Yet it will not do to call Plato a failure in practical matters. It will not do because he founded the Academy, which, for extent and continuity of influence upon the minds of men, may claim with some show of reason to have been excelled by no other European institution except the Church of Rome. In one form or another it lasted for nine centuries, and while its influence waxed and waned at different periods it may fairly be said to have been the principal agent in forming ancient thought. Christianity owes it an incalculable debt. Upon Christian doctrine, on its philosophical side, there have been two main influences—the Platonic and the Aristotelian, and Aristotle was, after all, only a recalcitrant Platonist. The creator of such



an institution was no mere dreamer. It was, in fact, the embodiment of a very definite purpose and was planned on the soundest lines. It aimed at being a school for statesmen, and its method was to train its pupils by encouraging them to pursue knowledge for its own sake. The more "useless" subjects like geometry and dialectic were studied with particular zeal. This was throwing down the gage with a vengeance. The result splendidly vindicated Plato. It was not merely that the Academy at once proceeded to achieve the most dazzling success in what is nowadays called original research, but it was taken seriously as a seminary of public men. Greek states would apply to it for plans of government or even for an Academician to come and rule them. How far these experiments were a success is another matter; politics is a funny business. The interesting thing is that they were made. It is clear that Plato understood very well what he was doing, that he could manage the business of "organising" better than anybody. It is what he always said. The philosopher, as he understands more clearly than other men the causes of things, should be able to "do" things better also.

He was eighty years old when he died, after a life as full of intellectual and spiritual experience as that of any of the sons of men. He left behind him the idea of a university, a world philosophy, and a body of literature which for power and subtlety, for delicate irony and imaginative splendour ranks him first among the prose writers of the world.

## THE DIALOGUE

PLATO chose to write for the public in the literary form called the Dialogue. He did not invent it, but he brought it to perfection. Aristotle tells us that it was akin to the Mime, and Aristotle ought to know, for he wrote Dialogues himself. The Mime, which might be



written in prose or verse, had two invariable characteristics: it was humorous and it was "realistic." The best known example of a Mime is in verse, the *Syracusan Women*, of Theocritus, which Matthew Arnold translated. The *Syracusan Women*, however, gives far too favourable a notion of the general run of Mimes, which take a scene directly from "life," generally from low life, and render it with a Dutch fidelity. The method of representation was always dramatic or semi-dramatic. Hence the Mime is often spoken of as a form of ancient Comedy. Now, the Dialogue in Plato's hands became a thing above not merely the capacity but almost the imagination of the old Mime writer, but it is for all that the Mime transfigured. The coarseness has naturally disappeared, but the satire, the realism, the dramatic method remain. This is not a point of merely literary interest, but one which, if misunderstood or disregarded, leads the student of Plato's philosophy into serious and sometimes comic mistakes.

Then there is the still more interesting matter of the Platonic irony. Ancient Comedy normally represented a contest between what was called an *Eiron* and what was called an *Alazon*. The second type was the pretentious man, the humbug, the impostor; the first was the plain man who, with quiet and somewhat sly humour, drew the impostor out and finally exposed him. From *Eiron* comes our word irony. Now, the old Attic Comedy loved to deal in personalities, particularly, of course, when it came to naming the impostor. With joy it seized upon Socrates. Everybody knew him, he was funny to look at, and he would serve delightfully as a specimen of the intellectual humbug, the "high-brow." No particular harm was meant. It was the fun of the fair and the victim was supposed to laugh with the rest. There is every probability and some doubtful evidence that Socrates did laugh with the rest. But to see what it was that Plato



did one must never forget that it was not he, but the writers of Comedy, particularly the great Aristophanes, in his *Clouds*, who first brought Socrates into literature. What Plato did was to reverse his rôle. In the Dialogues, Socrates is no longer the impostor; he is the ironical man. Of course, in Plato's treatment he becomes infinitely more than the mere ironist, but irony is essential to him. He gave it the stamp of his character to such a degree that irony, as we now understand it, is pretty much what Socrates made it.

Since, therefore, the Dialogues are a form of Comedy, we must read them in that sense. We must remember that ancient Comedy cared nothing for the truth, that it delighted in raillery, and in what is commonly understood by realism. Take the last point. Realism, of course, has nothing to do with the truth as such. It is the business of the realist to be lifelike, and to argue that certain details in the Dialogues must be historical because they are so "convincing" is as simple-minded as believing *Robinson Crusoe*. Not that the Dialogues are fiction, except in so far as they resemble the historical novel. They deal with actual people, whose sayings and doings they report with reasonable fidelity; that is, with the fidelity reasonable in a very great literary and dramatic artist who was aiming at a very different kind of truth from that which is the aim of the historian. Plato himself, in one of his letters, no doubt authentic, says that the Socrates of his Dialogues is Socrates rejuvenated—"made young and beautiful"—that is, Socrates idealised, Socrates dramatised. This does not mean Socrates falsified and misrepresented; on the contrary, Plato no doubt believed, and believed rightly, that the picture he gave of his hero was essentially truer than would be a literal record of what he did and said, just as an imaginative portrait of a man gives a truer impression of him than his photograph. One would not like to swear to the truth of any particular detail in Plato's



portraiture of Socrates, but one could swear to the truth of the picture as a whole.

Attempts have been made to discriminate in the Dialogues between the teaching of Socrates and the teaching of Plato. In the interests of the history of thought perhaps such efforts have to be made; they will certainly continue to be made. They must continue to be very doubtful and illusory. To think of Socrates in the Dialogues as the mere mouthpiece of Plato is, in the opinion of the present writer, certainly wrong, for it is to misconceive the nature of Plato's art. That art, we have seen, is of the dramatic order. The business of the dramatist is, as Aristotle would put it, to say not what Socrates did and said, but the sort of things Socrates would do and say. He will, of course, use such actual deeds and words as were specially characteristic of his hero, but for the rest he will invent a great deal of which all that you can say is that it is "in character." And we cannot at this date tell, although we may sometimes feel tolerably sure, where fact begins and invention ends. Even so, we must remember the unconscious bias of the writer, for even the facts are the facts as Plato sees them. The facts as Xenophon, another witness, saw them produce on us a widely different impression. It has been necessary to dwell a little on this point because Plato has been a good deal the victim of people for whom the processes of the creative imagination mean very little, who think of him merely as a philosopher with a style. Such people instinctively think of his art as irrelevant to his philosophy. But, in the Dialogues at least, you cannot separate the one from the other.

### PLATONISM

To expound in detail the philosophy of the Dialogues is quite beyond the scope and purpose of this book. The most that can be done is to suggest to the reader



who is not too clever for the writer how he may most profitably begin the study of Plato. That is why so much space has been devoted to mere introductory matter. The truth is that without this introduction Plato must remain a puzzle. If you try to find a "system" in him, you will only come on contradictions; but if you remember that he is, in his way, a dramatist for whom the conclusion is often less important than the argument, you will not go far wrong. At the same time the Dialogues are anything but a jumble of conflicting views. All views are considered, and no doubt, as he grew older, Plato himself gave up or altered some of his own. But, if one may put it so, he was always a Platonist. Every Dialogue, even the earliest and slightest, helps to build up our understanding of that most wonderful thing, the mind of Plato. While, therefore, we cannot put down in black and white what were his final views on any of the great questions of science and philosophy—he himself warns us against that—we can say perfectly well what his general attitude was to each of them.

One may as well begin with the theory of Ideas, which has made so great a noise in the world. It has been regarded as the very basis of the Platonic philosophy, and in making Socrates expound it in the Dialogues, it was thought that their author was employing a dramatic fiction. More recently it has been argued that some doctrine of Ideas was, in fact, held by the historical Socrates, and that Plato himself came to regard it as inadequate or even wrong. Whether this be so or not, Plato is never more Platonic than when he is discussing Ideas. The word is misleading to the uninformed, since it has nothing to do with ideas in the modern sense. But no substitute is quite satisfactory, and "the Ideas of Plato" is a phrase with so long and famous a history that we may as well stick to it now.

Greek philosophy had begun in an effort to answer



the question: What is the world made of? It is the sort of question a child asks, and it had been asked no doubt as soon as men began to reflect at all. The genius of the Greeks came out in the sort of answer they gave it. Other peoples were satisfied to say, "God made the world out of nothing" or "It is made out of the body of a giant," or something like that. The Greeks saw that this was not an answer at all, but merely the substitution of one problem for another. It was explaining the natural by means of the supernatural, and science must not do that. Accordingly, these first philosophers argued that all things were ultimately made of one substance, such as water or air or fire. We now know, of course, that water and air and fire are themselves capable of further analysis, but we know it because the Greeks set us on the track of finding it out. In fact, physical science, and in a manner all science, is still trying to answer the old question in the Greek spirit. The Greeks themselves quickly became dissatisfied with their first simple answers, and thought out better ones. Meanwhile, another problem became more and more urgent, "How far can we trust our senses?" The world seems a very real thing to our senses; yet what is it, in the world, that is real? Is it the impression of the moment? But that is gone as soon as it has been felt, and the impression of the next moment may be, nay, must be, different from its predecessor. Yet, surely, what is real must be real always, it cannot change from moment to moment. It looks, therefore, as if the senses can give us no information about reality at all. That, extremely simplified, was the problem which confronted Plato.

The theory of Ideas may have been suggested by geometry, the first and favourite science of the Greeks. Take, for instance, the circle. Nobody ever saw a perfect circle; you cannot with all your care and the best compasses describe one. Nevertheless, the geometer



can prove certain things to be true, to be true always and everywhere, of the perfect circle. When he uses a pair of compasses it is merely to draw something which will "remind" him of "the circle itself," something which will be an "image" or "copy" of that. The difficulty, it will be seen, is to find language to express the relation between the perfect circle and what the geometer draws; there is no difficulty in seeing that the difference is there. That difference is vital, because what the geometer proves is true of the perfect circle only, and not of the round figure he draws, which cannot, in the nature of things, be perfectly or "ideally" round. The figure he draws is merely an illustration. He is not really arguing about *it* at all, but about the Idea of the circle, the "circle itself," or "just circle." Or, again, if a master is teaching a boy that the sum of the internal angles of the triangle is equal to the sum of two right angles, he may begin by telling the boy to draw a triangle on the blackboard. If the boy should ask, "What kind of triangle?" the master will say: "Any kind of triangle." For what he is going to prove is true of "the triangle," not only of the equilateral or isosceles or scalene triangle—and not at all of the chalk figure which the boy proceeds to draw. That may be rubbed out and another triangle of quite a different shape described, which will do just as well.

Of course, while you may not call any triangle you draw "*the* triangle," there is something about it which enables one to call it *a* triangle and be understood. Now, it is this something which, according to the theory of Ideas, gives the particular triangle any reality it possesses; without this something it is an unintelligible smear of chalk. This implies that it is only the intelligible that is, in the philosophical sense, real; the rest of existence is merely "phenomenal"—that is, merely appears to the senses to be real. In this life we are dependent upon our senses for information



about the external world, and they can present us only with phenomena or appearances. But besides the senses we have a faculty (which we may roughly identify with the reason) enabling us to reach true conclusions about the realities of which the phenomena are appearances. It is these realities which are the Ideas. Observe that the theory does not deny all reality to the phenomenal world. On the contrary, it insists that this world is real up to a point—that is, so far as the Ideas “are present to” it or it “participates in” or “imitates” the Ideas. But the theory denies reality to phenomena in any other sense than this.

It is easy to see difficulties in such a view of the world we live in, and Plato was perfectly well aware of them himself. It is not hard to grasp the notion of triangularity as distinct from any figure we may draw or the notion of goodness as distinct from any particular good thing. We may, therefore, talk intelligibly about the Idea of a triangle or the Idea of the good. But what is the Idea of a rose or a horse or a man? This is not the place for attacking or defending the theory, but for indicating its importance and its interest. And what can be more important or more interesting to the thinking man than this doctrine that behind the world we see and touch is another world, more true, more real, more good and beautiful, which with the eye of reason we may behold dimly and by glimpses on earth, but in heaven shall see in all its glory? It is to Plato men owe the first reasoned statement of that vision and that hope.

What, then, is knowledge? The impressions which the senses give us are of things which never *are*, but are always *becoming*; and such impressions are not knowledge. Does it come, then, by thinking? If we say “yes,” we shall be asked: “How do you know your thoughts are true?” We must, therefore, have some criterion of truth which is independent of the senses and independent of mere thinking, for certainly



we may, and do, think wrongly as well as rightly. Plato discusses this very difficult question, discusses it in the dramatic manner of the Dialogue, letting his mind play on the subject now from this side and now from that. In the *Meno* appears the famous suggestion that knowledge comes by a process of remembering the truths we knew before we were born. If we believe that the soul of a man is immortal, we must believe (the argument runs) that it existed *before* it entered his body, just as it will exist after his death. In that world, not of the senses, in which the soul dwelt before the man was born it contemplated all truth and all reality. But in the dim prison of the body it forgets what it knew, and has to be reminded. This process of being reminded is what we call learning. Something starts the process, gives us (as we say) a hint, which we follow up in thought. This is where the senses help—they start us thinking. We see a circle drawn on a blackboard, and by thinking about it we arrive at certain conclusions about the properties of “the circle” which are true conclusions because the properties are eternal and immutable. We have never in this life seen “the circle”; we must, therefore, have seen it elsewhere. But without the aid of the blackboard figure we should never have been reminded of the heavenly circle. Hence, knowledge is attained not by thinking alone, nor by the senses alone, but by their co-operation. In a later Dialogue, the *Theætetus*, Plato goes over the whole question carefully without making use or even mention of the Ideas or the theory that learning is a process of being reminded; a theory often called the doctrine of Reminiscence. He starts from the opinion of Protagoras that knowledge is relative—that what I know is true for me, whatever it may be for you—and suggests that he may have meant that knowledge is “true opinion accompanied by *logos*,” but what exactly *logos* here implies, he does not say. He is not bound to say; he is writing a Dialogue.



Another way of looking at the matter may be found in the *Republic*. There the existence of the Ideas is taken very much for granted; what is more, they are regarded as forming a graduated or ordered system; they are not all on an equal footing. At the head of this hierarchy is the Idea of the Good, which, though not itself reality and being, gives reality and being to everything else as the sun gives light to the world. This simile is elaborated in another, still more famous. Men are like prisoners in a cave, so fastened that they must sit facing the back of the cave, the sole illumination of which comes through its mouth. Outside, passing quite close to the cave, is a road flanked on the near side by a wall. Along the road people keep passing up and down, occasionally stopping to talk. Some are carrying things in their hands or on their heads. Beyond the road and its passengers is a great fire burning, which shines into the cave and casts upon its interior face, on which the prisoners are gazing, shadows of those moving folk, or, rather, shadows of as much of them as rises above the wall. At the same time the sound of talk enters the cave and, echoed from the cave wall, seems to come from the busy shadows moving there. What can the prisoners, who have never been out of the cave, or even allowed to turn their heads, imagine, except that the shadows are real flesh and blood?

But now let one prisoner be permitted to look behind him. He would see at once where the shadows and the sounds were coming from. Suppose he were allowed actually to leave the cave, and go up to and beyond the wall and the fire, and see the sun himself revealing everything in its true colours. At first he would be dazzled by this brightness, but in a little his eyes would get accustomed to it and he would see the world as it is. But suppose, further, that in pity for the prisoners in the cave, his fellow-men, he should go back to them and tell them what he had seen, would



they not treat him as an impostor? Well, the philosopher is like the man who leaves the cave; the rest who abide there are those who will not or cannot see the truth, and who believe that the world of sense—the shadows on the wall—is real.

So understood, the great end of the philosopher is to see the sun—to contemplate the Idea of the Good. But he must gradually prepare and strengthen his eyes for this, otherwise he will be dazzled or even blinded. Plato never suggests what so many of the mystics have believed—that one has but to see the truth in order to comprehend it. Rather it might almost be called his main purpose to insist that we only comprehend the truth when we have “thought it out.” There is a strictly logical method of doing this, which he calls *Dialectic*. It is a way of dealing with what he calls “hypotheses,” but we would rather call postulates or initial assumptions. Each of the physical sciences assumes without proof the validity of certain propositions, from which all its conclusions are ultimately drawn. Arithmeticians, for example, assume as self-evident the truth of the statement that two and two makes four. Euclid assumes that a straight line may be drawn between any two points. It is the business of *Dialectic* to examine these assumptions and see what truth (if any) is in them. This, because *Dialectic* is never satisfied with any assumption, in so far as it is just assumption, is called “destroying the hypotheses.” The pursuit of this method ought to bring us at last to the Idea of the Good itself, which is the source of all truth that is in the “hypotheses” or elsewhere. Thus *Dialectic* is the special instrument of the philosopher; but he must know science in order to use his tool.

Plato's attitude to science is very interesting. It was a thing he admired intensely and valued very highly. The Academy devoted to scientific studies an amount of time which would be thought quite disproportionate in any modern university. Even more important than



that was the scientific spirit which permeated the school. Mathematics was made, as it were, the basis of the curriculum. The study of Plato in the last forty years or so has tended more and more to emphasise the scientific, more particularly the mathematical, side of Platonism. For all that, he does not believe that science by itself can lead us to the truth. It never gets beyond probabilities. It gives us an explanation of the facts before it which might account for them, but beyond that it does not go and should not pretend to go. Such a view is very like that held by more than one philosophical scientist of our day, and Plato did not in the least mean to disparage science by it. But we must remember what his view was when we read his own scientific speculations. The physical sciences in particular deal with phenomena—that is, with things as they appear to us, not as they are. We cannot, then, expect the truth from the physical sciences. It is, therefore, a great error to take anything Plato may say about the constitution or configuration of the earth and such matters—and he has much to say about them—as “gospel.” Indeed, he has suffered a good deal from devotees who would take everything he says as gospel. He is not a philosopher for literal minds.

His views upon the nature of knowledge affect, of course, his views upon education, a business very near to the heart of Plato. The foundation of the Academy proves that. But his interest was not confined to the studies pursued in the Academy; it extended to elementary education and even “infant welfare.” It was natural enough for Plato to found a “school” of his own, and he had before him the example of Pythagoras, who had established a brotherhood of fellow-mathematicians and co-religionists long ago. But that a philosopher should concern himself with the whole business, practical as well as theoretical, of education was something new. Yet this, too, was natural in a follower of Socrates, who held that “virtue is know-



ledge." Clearly, if that be true, education becomes a matter of inestimable importance. To us the doctrine of Socrates appears more paradoxical than it did to the Greeks, who were accustomed to express the problem of knowledge in the form: "How can you do a thing well unless you know how to do it?" That, at any rate, is a practical question, whether it is logically sound or not. In the spirit of it Plato wrote much of his *Republic*, which is very largely a treatise on education. Man, being a social animal, can attain his proper goodness only in a community; the nearer perfection the state in which he lives, the better chance the citizen has of attaining to perfect virtue. The first thing to do, then, is to construct the best polity we can or, as the Greeks generally put it, to enact the best laws. Then we must have someone to administer them, someone who shall be, as it were, the intelligent embodiment of the laws, which otherwise are sure to act stupidly or harshly. Thus our search for the best state becomes a search for the best statesman. Now, since statesmanship is the highest and hardest of all human activities, it is clear that our statesman ought to be specially educated for his task. The scheme of education outlined in the *Republic* has, of course, an independent value; but it may also be regarded as a device for discovering through a long series of progressively difficult tests who is the man best fitted by ability and character to rule the rest of us.

Plato does not begin by rejecting all previous systems. He is quite content, so far as elementary instruction goes, with the existing system properly worked. A young boy in Plato's time was taught "music and gymnastics." That is, he was taught to read and write and count and play the harp a little—all this was "music"—and he was put through a good deal of not very severe physical exercise. As for methods, there was much learning by heart. The boy was required to recite and, as far as you could expect of him, expound



passages of literature, chiefly from Homer. The first thing which strikes an English critic of this scheme is that it appears to take no account of the training of character. That impression is hardly just. Morality was supposed to be inculcated by the lessons taught. Nor can anyone say that the Greeks were indifferent in the matter; if anything, they were rather surer than we that the end of education is to produce good citizens. Yet it is on the moral point that Plato fixes. The poets, he thinks, are not good teachers of morality. His criticism here sounds narrow-minded, but we must remember that he was combating the opposite view, which is at least equally narrow-minded. It is, perhaps, a good enough answer to those who say that it is the poet's function to give ethical instruction—and this was commonly said—to reply that it is not. Plato's own view, as we see in the *Phædrus* and elsewhere, was that the poet was merely a vessel of inspiration, which inspiration might come (in Puritan language) from the devil as readily as from God. Besides, if the theory of Ideas be accepted, the poet has less to do with the truth than almost anyone. For poetry is a kind of "imitation," and what it imitates are the objects of sense, which themselves are imitations of reality. Poetry stands, therefore, at the third remove from truth, and it is truth that we must teach our children. We dare not teach them, as the poets do, that God is capable of human passions or even of mutability. We should not even teach them poetry in which the victory of passion is described. Here, perhaps, our sympathy begins to leave Plato, but at any rate we must admit that, so far from eliminating the moral factor in education, he emphasises and—most people would say—over-emphasises it.

On the other hand, nobody was ever less likely to say: "Be good, sweet child, and let who will be clever." Truth and goodness being, in his view, ultimately one, the road to Truth, which is study, is also



the road to Virtue. So the child, if he prove mentally capable, must proceed to the study of the sciences, and from them to Dialectic. In this way we shall at last discover our ablest and most virtuous men, and set them in authority over us. With luck we may find our best man of all and make him king. Then we shall have the nearest approach possible on earth to the perfect constitution, which cannot come until "philosophers"—that is, men qualified in this manner—"become kings and kings philosophers."

From the time of Aristotle it has been objected to the proposals in the *Republic* that they ask too much of human nature. Yet Plato understood human nature pretty well. What, then, was his intention? It is now generally assumed that the *Republic* is, to all intents and purposes, an Utopia. A phrase of his own appears to admit this. But it is only a passing and ruefully humorous phrase, natural enough in its place. The present writer cannot avoid the feeling that Plato believed, and believed rather passionately, that his Republic could be established, if people would only give it and him and themselves a fair chance. That, of course, was a tremendous "if," and thinking of it made him sometimes despair. But sometimes he would be hopeful too. Late in life, when most of the hope was gone, he lowered his demands upon humanity and produced in the *Laws* a scheme of government which he certainly thought might be administered upon earth. But could it?

The total body of the citizens in the Republic is divided into three classes—the Guardians, the Warriors (often classed with the Guardians), and the Artisans. The functions of these classes are fairly suggested by their names, that of the Guardians being to govern the state, that of the Warriors to fight for it, while the Artisans form the general body of the citizens. The Guardians—or Rulers, as they are often called—and the Warriors or Auxiliaries (their usual



name) are specially qualified and trained bodies, comparatively few in numbers, especially, of course, the former; and as the welfare of the community reposes on them, it is on their work and training that Plato concentrates. If we forget this, we are apt to get our view of his Republic quite out of proportion and think that what applies to some applies to all.

To select our governors for nothing except their ability to govern—that is Plato's proposal. It was not because he knew little, it was because he knew so much of human nature, that he almost despaired of seeing put into practice a suggestion in itself so reasonable. In his imagined state the Guardians and Warriors are forbidden the possession of private property. Women are to be educated in exactly the same way as men, and promoted or not promoted on exactly the same considerations. The family is to be abolished for the governing classes. The sexes in these classes are to meet in rigorously guarded circumstances. The children of such unions are to be taken over by the state at birth and reared in ignorance of their parents, who likewise shall be ignorant of their children. These proposals come from a man, not ignorant, but terrified of the effects produced in politics by money and nepotism. In one of his austerer moods he might have said that "mother love" is a beautiful thing, but good government is more beautiful; and the two seem incompatible.

These exceptional, these startling innovations apply only to exceptional people, the Guardians and the Warriors. All the rest of the community, comprising the great bulk of it—workmen and employers and what we call the professional classes—are, presumably, to conduct their affairs as in any other Greek state. So the Republic as a whole cannot fairly be described as communistic or even socialistic. Communism or socialism restricted to a class would seem to be a contradiction in terms. As for the "community of women"



for the Guardians, it is something quite different from promiscuity; it is rather an attempt on the part of the state to regulate the procreation of children. Such an attempt is instinctively resented by the average man, who feels it to be somehow indecent. He probably in his heart has less objection to promiscuity. Plato, on his part, is thinking of the children; he is what is now called a eugenicist. Here, again, whether his proposals be feasible or not, he has raised and seriously tried to answer a question of transcendent importance.

Why should there be just three classes in the state? Because, says Socrates, the human soul is divided into three parts. These are the appetitive, the spirited, the rational part. The last is what makes a man a thinker, the second what makes him a fighter, the first what makes him what we may call the human animal. To the first corresponds the Artisan class, to the second the Warriors, to the third the Guardians. The philosopher is the man in whom reason predominates, the soldier is he in whom "high spirit," the business man he in whom "desire" prevails. "Spirit," or "high spirit" (*thumos*) ranks higher than "desire" (*epithumia*), because it has an element of reflection and reasonableness in it—it is rather like what we call "a proper spirit"—whereas "desire" consists of such impulses as hunger, thirst, the instincts of sex, and all the unregenerate greedinesses. This is wildly far from a scientific psychology, but that would not trouble Plato, who had no belief in the possibility of a scientific psychology. To him the soul of man was fundamentally as great a mystery as it was to St. Paul or St. Augustine. But the triple classification had the advantage of being, on the face of it, intelligible and, very likely, already familiar to the auditors of Socrates. That was all Plato needed for his purpose in the *Republic*. Moreover, the scheme has certain merits of its own. Although his use of the word "parts" is



misleading to the unwary, Plato really means us to think of the soul as one and indivisible. But there is a condition of the soul when it is content with gratification of the bodily desires, another when it feels "righteous indignation," another when it exercises calm reflection; and it may progress from the lower to the higher. That is perfectly good psychology so far as it goes, although of course you never in practice get any of these conditions in an entirely pure form.

Experimental psychology or anything of that sort is foreign to Plato's thought. What very deeply interests him is the question of the immortality of the soul. On the day on which he died, we are told in the *Phædo*, Socrates discussed the problem and concluded that the soul was indeed immortal. In the *Apology* he seems to leave the question open. But there he is addressing a jury of average citizens, before whom it is enough for his purpose to argue that, whether the soul be immortal or not, "no evil can befall the good man in life or in death." In the *Phædo*, among very intelligent sympathisers, certain arguments are debated at full length. Their validity need not be discussed here, all the more because what we find in the *Phædo* is rather a critical account of a theory or theories of the soul current at the time than a complete statement and justification of Socrates' own faith in the matter. It was an old belief that the soul is by nature divine, and who says divine in Greek says immortal. In particular, the Orphics, a sect whose influence upon religion and philosophy has simply been overwhelming, held that each man's soul was a fallen god imprisoned for a season in the perishable body. That doctrine fascinates Plato and inspires some of his grandest writing, especially in those famous myths in which he imagines the fortunes of that immortal part of us when it leaves the mortal. What most appealed to him was the idea, essential to the general doctrine, that the life-imprisoned soul must purge by means of pure living and



thinking in this life the sins it committed in earlier existences, so that when after death it returns to its native clime, it may pass into eternal blessedness. With such a belief mortal life becomes merely an opportunity of fitting oneself for life immortal. Such a fitting or preparation of the soul is exactly what Plato hoped to give by his teaching, although, of course, he prepared it for this life also. He cannot be charged, like the Orphics, with "other-worldliness"; yet one understands that the central doctrine of the soul's divinity was sure to haunt and at last convince him. The argument which did convince him is mentioned in the *Phædrus* and developed in the *Laws*. The soul is immortal because the soul is the only kind of motion which moves itself. All other kinds are movements of bodies—movements which must be started by soul. From this it follows that soul is prior to body.

This conclusion, he thinks, may be used to prove the existence of God, since God is a soul. The argument here is very curious. Of all kinds of movement the most perfect is movement in a circle. Now, it is obvious to inspection that this is the kind of motion observed by the heavenly bodies. How do they come to move in this way? Left to themselves, they would move in a straight line. It follows that their circular motion was imparted to them, was imparted to them by a soul, was imparted by a good soul; and such a soul is what we mean by a god. Modern science has, of course, antiquated reasoning of that kind, but it is worth noting that Plato tried to base his reasoning on scientific grounds. His astronomy was the best he knew. The strange thing is that he should have felt so perfect a confidence in it. He really did believe that he had found in the natural world the evidence for the existence of God. So certain does this evidence appear to him that he is persuaded that, if any man professes not to see so plain a truth, it must be due to wilful or sinful blindness. Such a man ought to be prosecuted



by the State, and, if he persist in his heresy, even put to death. Is there in history a more tragic piece of irony?

Historically, of course, that is intensely interesting. But Plato, if he is the unconscious founder of the Inquisition, is the conscious founder of something more important—the science of theology. True, he does not regard God as supreme in the world, for with him God is only the best soul, and souls are not the highest things in the world. There is, for instance, over and beyond God the Idea of the Good. But, apart from this question whether God is the cause of His own existence or not, He is conceived by Plato in a way familiar to the modern theologian. That is one of the most significant steps in the record of human thought. Before Plato or Socrates the Greeks had tended to think of the gods as supernormal beings, the question of whose goodness was somewhat academic; while earlier philosophers had for the most part quietly left them out of their speculations altogether. On the other hand, Hebrew and non-Hellenic thought generally was unscientific. It was left to Plato to suggest and partly to develop the implications logically involved in the thesis that God exists and is good. Christian theology in particular can be traced back, through Aristotle, to Plato.


It was always said of Socrates that his chief interest was in morals. Plato shared this interest of his master to the full. It was not restricted, as perhaps that of Socrates was, to human virtue, but included the stars, which Plato regarded as much more divine and important members of the universe than man. It would also be easy to make out a case for the view that Plato was chiefly driven by an intellectual passion for the truth. But the fact is that his passion for the truth is at bottom the same thing as his ethical fervour, since for him the true is the good.

What is important for us to remember is that to



Plato, as to the Greeks in general, goodness appears in a somewhat different light from that in which we see it. He did not normally think of it as a natural gift or grace of disposition, but as something attained and maintained by knowledge. It is wrong, however, to call him an intellectualist. His point—and this he got from Socrates—is that to know the good is to do it, provided, of course, that you really know it and so make it your own and are not hampered by some physical obstacle or some morbidity or illusion of the mind. That is why there is so little discussion of the will in Plato. For him to know the good and to will and to do it were in the healthy moral agent a single act, which you might of course analyse into these or more aspects, but which you could not understand if you studied each aspect by itself. Such a view exposes itself to criticism, but it would clearly be absurd to call it intellectualism. The rather common modern notion that to explain a thing is to explain it away did not afflict the ancient Greeks.

On the general point nothing will help the ordinary student of Plato's philosophy more than keeping steadily in mind its organic unity. When a Dialogue has for its subject the nature of knowledge or of goodness, we ought to read it in the light of the whole Platonic doctrine. No doubt it would be hard to say at any particular time what the whole Platonic doctrine was, for the doctrine itself kept developing and, besides, is stated in the form of dramatic monologue or colloquy. In general, it is clear that the earlier Dialogues are simpler, more dramatic, closer to the teaching of the historical Socrates than the later. Thus, the advance in profundity and in subtlety between the comparatively late *Theætetus* and *Philebus* and the comparatively early *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* is very great. For all that, there is something in the earliest and the slightest Dialogue, even if it be no more than a sketch of Socrates in action,





which is also present in the *Laws* and the *Timæus*. This something is the Platonic way of looking at things. It is easily felt, but not so easily defined. It seems to come largely from his conviction that goodness, truth, and beauty are resolved in and yet explain and distinguish one another. Without losing their identity they blend in one flame, which, in the *Phædrus*, he has called Eros. This is the true "Platonic love," to understand which is to understand as far as possible the secret of Plato.

But, of course, the secret remains inviolate. Plato himself, the supreme master of words, could find no words in which to express it. In one of his rather sad letters he tells us so. Only in the converse of sincere and sympathetic minds, in love with truth and trained to the last degree of intellectual fineness, will come flashes and glimpses of that eternal and unchanging world behind the veil. To believe this or something like this is to be a Platonist at heart, even if one cannot follow the master in all his theories and proposals. Such a belief will always fire the minds of men. It is easy to call it mysticism; but when we call Plato a mystic, we must be sure what we mean by the name. He never claims for himself "the mystic experience," which enables the patient to say that he has reached the truth by some other process than reasoning. He could never have believed a thing to be true which could not be proved by argument; his error, if it was one, lay rather in believing that there was nothing true which could not, sooner or later, be proved to be true. On the other hand, Plato recognises more than most philosophers the difficulty of "proving" anything at all. In the physical sciences, for instance, proof in the strict meaning of the word is not, he thinks, to be looked for; it is the domain of belief or probable opinion. Accordingly, in all this vast domain, in which if anywhere most people expect to find the truth, Plato has no such expectation. Whatever one



calls him, it will not do to call him uncritical. But his very strictness has this curious effect. He conceives himself at liberty to proceed through the world of physical science rather like Satan on his way to Eden, now on foot and now upon soaring pinion. It is these winged adventures of his that have chiefly brought him a reputation for mysticism. But there is a method in them.

So long as he is dealing with what scientific men call "results," Plato uses carefully precise and even technical language. The Academy was getting "results" every year, many of them of the sort called "epoch-making"; and the founder of the Academy was most certainly not unaware of the importance of having them accurately stated. As for their value and influence, these form a fascinating topic, but it belongs rather to the history of science than to our present subject. We may permit ourselves the general statement that the mathematical sciences in particular owe an incalculable debt to the Academy. Euclid's *Geometry*, in many ways the most remarkable book ever written, largely embodies both the method and the conclusions of Plato's school. The great men, such as Galileo, who revived science after the Middle Ages, tended to be Platonists. On the other hand, those whose interest is in mechanical or biological studies are disposed to look on Plato as the great historic enemy of their researches. This is undoubtedly an error; in fact, if it implies that the philosopher objected to such researches on principle. It is probably true that he diverted scientific brains to mathematics and the very difficult philosophy which he built on mathematics. Plato's defence would be that the non-mathematical sciences in his time were in too rudimentary a state to allow of any important general conclusions to be drawn from them. This was no doubt true. But students of physiology and kindred subjects complain that he not only did nothing for them, he actually



imported grave error and confusion into them. The *Timæus* illustrates these points. It is an account—not, perhaps, the account Plato himself would have given—of the creation of the world, including the creation of the human body. It may be said in general that its physiology is condemned by physiologists and its mathematics admired by mathematicians. Professor Whitehead even thinks that we may have to go back to the *Timæus* for a view of the universe which will support the criticism of mathematical physics. There is real historical irony in this. For century after century the *Timæus* affected scientific theory. Even in the ages immediately following Plato, and throughout the political domination of Rome, it affected the views of astronomers, doctors, and biologists. Its influence on the medieval mind clear up to the thirteenth century was almost tyrannical. Of course, medieval thinkers made—and small blame to them—little or nothing of the mathematical physics in the *Timæus*. What fascinated them was the story of how the heavens and earth, how man's body and soul were created. It was practically the only thing of Plato's they knew, and they knew it only in a bad and imperfect Latin translation. But Plato was a name to conjure with. His own warning that he must not be taken literally was disregarded. They looked upon him as a sort of prophet, whose message was none the less verbally inspired that he spoke darkly on many matters; that is the prophet's way. The effect of their method was, of course, disastrous. It resulted in the extraordinary amalgam of fact and fancy which the Middle Ages, till about the time of Roger Bacon, accepted as "science." The reaction against the *Timæus* was violent in proportion to the effect it had produced, and readers of Plato came to look upon that Dialogue as little better than mysterious nonsense. For the general reader, unless he happen to have a turn for mathematical metaphysics, it will probably continue to



be mysterious. But he will perhaps take it from the experts that it is not nonsense.

Plato, like most great writers, avoids abrupt transitions. He does not tell you, as Aristotle does, when he has finished one topic and is passing to another. Yet one easily notices the change in Plato when he leaves more or less assured "results" and embarks on speculation. He rarely does this without some hint or warning; but even in the absence of such, one feels the difference in style. His language becomes less technical and more general; it acquires fresh colour, emotion, imagination. We are no longer in any possible "scientific" world. The process culminates in many of the Dialogues in a "myth." It is possible for intelligent critics to differ about the philosophical value of the Platonic Myths; there is no difference with respect to their magnificence as literature. Only Dante has rivalled them in the combination of splendour and preciseness of imagination; in Plato, as in Dante, everything has a sort of double beauty, as it were, the beauty of poetry and the beauty of mathematics. Every detail counts twice over, as part of an artistic and part of a philosophic whole. This wonderful and almost inconceivably difficult combination is even better achieved by Plato than by Dante, over whom he has some advantage in intellectual power and the plasticity of the Greek language. As to the beauty of Greek prose in the hands of Plato (when he chooses), it is hard to speak of that without extravagance, but one really does sometimes feel that it has caught a reflection from that celestial beauty which so haunted his imagination.

The Myth, or Story—for that is all the word means in Greek—is obviously a very ancient form of literature indeed, although it is usually a long time before it gets itself written down. In early Greece it was essentially oral and traditional; there might be some history in it, or very little, or none at all. Usually it conveyed some



simple moral. Sometimes the moral was the real point and occasion of the story, and then it might be called a Fable or Apologue. But in the main the office of the Story was to be the vehicle of tradition. When Herodotus came to write his book, the first true *history* in the world, he collected all the Stories he could and tried to sift out the truth in them by application of a brilliant, and in some ways remarkably modern, critical intelligence. But Herodotus was not critical enough for the intellectuals of the next generation, who, for the most part, regarded the Stories either as "lies" or as the babblings of the world's childhood. That was certainly not the view of Plato, who set a high value on tradition and who saw that the Stories were, in fact, simply uncritical history and science. This seems to be the reason why, when he came to deal with matter of an historical or scientific character yet not patient of exact demonstration, he deals with it in the form of a Story or Myth.

It is well to be clear about that, because it is quite usual to find it said that the Myths in Plato embody what he considered his deepest thought. We are told that, when strictly logical reasoning from scientific first principles can do no more, he ascends into a region whither the exact sciences cannot soar but which contains a truth transcending theirs. And it is sometimes added that Plato would probably sympathise with the view that it is the poets after all who have come nearest to expressing for us the ultimate meaning of the world. He would have disliked that suggestion extremely. Nor would it be easy to think of anything calculated to vex him more than that his admirers should look for his "secret" in the Myths. We must not even say that they are attempts to translate into dramatic and pictorial language the philosopher's vision of the Idea of the Good—that Idea which, according to the *Republic*, is the source of all goodness and reality. Plato is quite clear that the vision cannot be described



at all. It bursts upon the thinker as the result and reward of an intense and protracted course of *scientific* reasoning of the strictest sort, and it bursts all at once and as a whole. Such a whole cannot be indicated in words, which can only build up a dome of many-coloured glass staining the white radiance of eternity. Here Plato speaks like the mystics; but one misses his whole point if one fails to see that to reveal the mystery is exactly what the Myths do *not* profess to do.

Their function is humbler. They give us something which is not higher, but lower, than true science. One may say "true" science, because a great deal of what passes for "science" in modern writing is just the sort of thing which Plato deals with in a Myth. He would call it, and does call it, conjecture—a very necessary process if science is to advance, but not science itself. The Head of the Academy had special opportunities to observe the inspired guessing which happens when scientific genius makes contact with fresh knowledge. But a guess remains a guess until its truth has been demonstrated. It should be a lesson to those who fancy that Plato is a high and mighty literary person, who looks down on the humble investigator of facts, to discover that he is only more rigorous in defining what "facts" are than many of the humble investigators. He is sharply aware that the sciences rest upon postulates which themselves require to be proved. Until this is done, to speak of "the facts" in geology, for instance, or physiology, is premature. The postulates of mathematics come nearest to having an absolute validity, and Plato would no doubt have accepted the view that the progress of a science may in general be measured by the degree in which it has been put on a mathematical basis. Meanwhile, it is safer not to commit ourselves to the position that we have "the facts" when, indeed, we have only "probable opinions," and a good way of insuring that is to express them in the form of a story.



This does not mean that Plato regarded the content of his Myths as unimportant. He offered them merely as what we now call "hypotheses," but he offered them seriously. And by putting them in story form he did not mean to treat his readers like children who will only take their powder in jam. The Myth is the appropriate form, he considered, for scientific guessing. In connection with this we may recall a fascinating belief of his. He thought that human civilisation had flourished and been wrecked several times during the history of man. This is quite likely to be true; indeed, the learned men who call themselves "prehistorians" more or less assume its truth. What happened, Plato suggested, was this. At every such catastrophe a few families living on the tops of lofty mountains or other safe places escaped the flood or fire which destroyed the rest. These survivors would naturally be the least civilised of their kind, but at any rate they would retain some sparks of the old wisdom, which, fostered and blown upon by their descendants, would after many generations blaze up again in full glory. In this process the preserving medium was the traditional stories, the "Greek Myths," as we call them; these and the proverbs. The primitive survivors of every cataclysm could not write, but they could remember, and their memories naturally embodied themselves in stories to their children. Thus in this childish and unconsciously garbled tradition some fragments of the truth have come down to us. That this is genuine Platonic doctrine is proved by the fact that Aristotle accepts it as a settled thing. It explains why the Myths in Plato regularly seek to account for the popular stories and traditions which have a bearing on the subject. He assumes that the stories were started by something, and for this something he looks. When he thinks he has found it, he gives us what he imagines is the truth of the whole matter; and inevitably he gives it in the form of a story himself.



The Platonic Myths are among the great achievements of literature, and criticism is not in the least likely to affect their pre-eminence on that side. One need only say that such things are not written without exquisite pains and exquisite delight for their composer. Therefore, when philosophers maintain (no doubt rightly) that Plato attached an importance to the Myths which, though considerable in its way, sank into nothing in comparison with the importance he attached to his demonstrations in mathematical metaphysics, we should be on our guard. Certainly to prove the existence of a good God is infinitely more important than to make the most beautiful work of art. The trouble is that posterity is likely to doubt your proof and to insist on admiring your art. This or something analogous is what happened to Tolstoy and Carlyle and Ruskin. Plato would have shared Ruskin's indignation because, when he told people their plain duty, they replied that he had a beautiful style. But it cannot alter the fact that the modern world has found more of what it considers the Platonic spirit in the Myths than anywhere else; and it does not follow that the modern world is wrong in this, because Plato would undoubtedly have thought it wrong.

We are now told that the true thought of the Master is to be found, if found at all, in late Dialogues like the *Timæus* and the *Laws*. The latter is a vast repository of his matured thought on matters relating, we might say, to Church and State. It completes, and to some extent supersedes, the more Utopian *Republic*. But it is just the Utopian element in the *Republic* that has fired the minds of men and made Plato seem more than the severely practical legislator of the *Laws*. A man may be greater, he certainly may be other than he himself recognises. When one reads the *Laws* and there discovers that to differ in opinion from the author on a point of theology is to be condemned for heresy, and very likely put to death; when one there

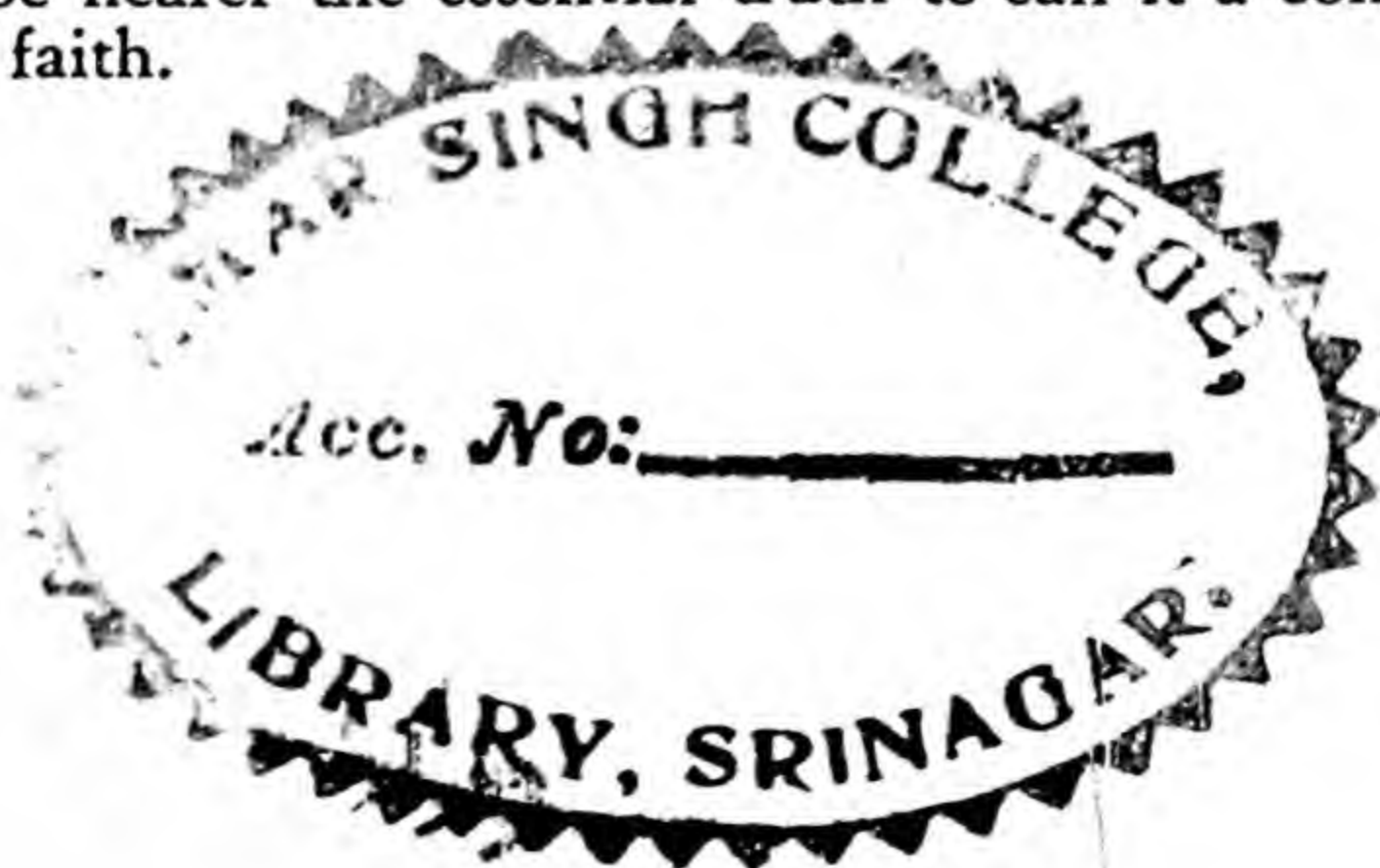


discovers the slightest disobedience of a slave punished with incredible severity, one may surely be forgiven for thinking that the gain in intellectual precision, alleged to exist in the *Laws*, is hardly full compensation for the earlier mood that built an imaginary state where slaves are never thought of and the spirit of inquiry ranges free. Nor can we forget that the *Republic* is a masterpiece of literature, while the *Laws* as literature is almost bad. About Plato of all philosophers it is idle to say that we must not let our judgment be affected by his genius as a writer. Without this genius he would not be Plato. If we try to forget it, we shall never know where we are. We can never really know what his esoteric doctrine was, because he has made a point of not telling us. Those who assure us that we must not presume to say we know anything about Platonism till we understand the "indeterminate dyad," and the rest of it are rather like the ingenious persons in the days of the South Sea Bubble, who urged people to invest their money in a certain scheme, "but nobody to know what it is."

It is, of course, right that scholars should insist on what Plato himself thought of most importance. It is also true that he had a profound influence on ancient and medieval thought by means of just those parts of his writing which deal with what Sir Thomas Browne calls "the mystical mathematics of heaven." But it would be a paradox to maintain that it is the mathematician in Plato that has meant most to the world. What, then, is it that makes him, what we all feel him to be, unique among philosophers? The explanation that it was his literary genius will not carry us far. It was necessary for him to have this genius if he was to find adequate expression for his thought, but you cannot separate his power of writing from his power of thinking. Efforts to do that seem destined to lead nowhere. Historically our answer will have to be something like this. Before Socrates the higher thinking of



Greece had tended—with some protests and exceptions—to become more and more rationalistic, in one of the senses of that term :—that is to say, philosophers were disposed to think they could find a reasonable explanation for everything; and, as a natural result of such a mood, they were too readily content with their explanations, which generally brought in mechanical causes. Socrates had the profoundest kind of conviction that such explanations left out exactly what was most valuable in and to the life of man. This conviction, which we may fairly call religious, was the force that drove him; his weapon was critical analysis of the current explanations made possible by his brilliant skill in logical argument. Plato inherited both the conviction and the skill, but added a new gift—a gift of expression such as (leaving the poets out of the question) had not appeared in literature before. Thus was effected what we might venture to call a new sublimation of human thought. Argument is not only far more logical in form, more exact and subtle than it had been; but the half mystical emotion of Socrates and the great Pythagoras before him is transmuted into imaginative language of an irresistible grandeur and attractiveness. It is this fusion of thought and feeling that makes Plato what he is. To call him a mystic or a rationalist or by any other label is, therefore, to miss the centre of the target. Platonism is not a “system”; it would be nearer the essential truth to call it a confession of faith.





# ARISTOTLE

## LIFE

ARISTOTLE was born in 384 B.C. at Stagira, a little town by the northern waters of Greece. It was an Ionian colony of considerable antiquity, and no doubt considerable pride in its inherited culture. But of its history we know scarcely anything. The host of Xerxes had passed that way a century before the birth of the philosopher, and must have left abiding memories of its passage. Later had come the influence of Athens in the day of her glory. Finally, almost contemporaneously with Aristotle, the semi-barbarous inhabitants of the wild Macedonian country behind Stagira were slowly hammered into a formidable military power by a succession of hard and cunning kings, who affected and perhaps acquired a certain degree of enlightenment, but were apt, on slight provocation, to reveal themselves as treacherous savages. As their might increased, these kings began to reach out their hands for the more outlying Greek cities. One of these was Stagira. Aristotle grew up under the shadow of this fear. No doubt his native town was able to make terms with its overwhelming neighbour, which were not intolerable. In particular, his father, Nicomachus, a doctor well reputed in his profession, was appointed physician to the Macedonian court. The king of the moment, Amyntas the Third, has a good name among these northern princes, but even under him the court of Pella was what it had always been, and continued to be—a den of murder, intrigue, and drunkenness. Aristotle never speaks of courts or kings without a contemptuous bitterness not at all like his usual self. It is not fanciful, it is only common sense to see that a man of refinement and intelligence must have shrunk



from the Macedonian gentleman's idea of a good time and thought of the bright Athenian life as something, with all its faults, desirable by comparison. If this was a prejudice, it was one with which it is possible to sympathise.

However, when he was only seventeen, he managed to get to Athens, and stayed there, off and on, for the rest of his life. At home he had probably "gone in for science." His father was a distinguished student of medicine, and the son inherited or acquired a disposition to view things from the standpoint of the doctor or (what was much the same thing in ancient practice) the biologist. Moreover, in that part of the Greek world where Stagira lay the traditional culture was scientific. At Abdera, not so far away, had lived a very remarkable writer and thinker, Democritus. He was roughly a contemporary of Socrates, and attempted to answer much the same questions, but the answers he gave were quite different. He believed in science, and built his philosophy on the recently invented atomic theory, which his genius for aphorism popularised. Science, in fact, was an Ionian discovery, and Ionian speculation was steeped in it. Such were the influences to which the youth of Aristotle was subjected. It is likely that he never outgrew them, and that, as such early influences are wont to do, they came back with renewed force as he got older. As soon as he could he became a member of the Academy under Plato. No doubt the personal eminence of the Master was an attraction, but we must not forget that the Academy at this time was the chief centre of scientific research in the world. It was, therefore, the natural place for an able young man of scientific tastes to enter.

Once a member of the Academy, there is no doubt that he fell completely under the influence of its Head. That was quite proper and natural, whatever its consequences. These early years must have been a happy as well as a formative time for Aristotle. He could not



have wished for anything better than to be one of that band of brothers, each with some touch of genius or large endowment of mind and character, arguing about all things in heaven and earth, making new discoveries every day. It was the memory of this time which helped him later to write about "friendship" with almost a religious feeling, and, when the break came with his old companions, to use the beautiful and touching phrase, "Both being dear, it would be wrong not to prefer the truth."

How did the break come about? That is not at all clear to us. For a long time Aristotle was apparently content to accept the full Platonic doctrine. We have brief notices and fragments of his writing at this period, and it seems to be pure Platonism. But doubtless even then there was some half-conscious resistance. He had a biological rather than a mathematical mind, and therefore was not naturally sympathetic with the tendency of Plato to make the study of mathematics the basis of philosophy. That study is almost the only branch of ancient knowledge in which Aristotle is not a master, and this would put him at a disadvantage with the brilliant geometers of the Academy. He may reasonably have felt that he was not doing himself justice or having justice done to him. When the question of a successor to Plato arose, Aristotle was passed over in favour of Speusippus, a man of altogether weaker abilities. But to Plato himself he remained faithful while Plato lived. Only after the Master's death in 348-7 B.C. Aristotle withdrew with Xenocrates, a fellow-student and future Head of the Academy, to the Asiatic coast of the Sea of Marmara, where Hermias, another friend and former Academician, had become ruler of Atarneus and Assos, two city states there. Hermias had a niece called Pythias, whom he had adopted as his daughter. This young lady Aristotle married, apparently for love, as he mentions her tenderly in his will long after she was



dead and he had, not quite legally, wedded another woman. He stayed in Assos for three years thinking out his position, and deepening and widening his knowledge. At the end of this period he crossed the sea to the island of Lesbos, not very far away. The attraction seems to have been Theophrastus, a fellow-student in the Academy, who was a native of Lesbos, and living there at the time. In his new home Aristotle seems to have given particular attention to the marine fauna of the isle, and the information he collected on this subject is regarded by zoologists as of first-rate quality.

From such occupations he was called by Philip, the great king of Macedonia, to superintend or help in the education of his son, the future Alexander the Great, who was then (343-2) about thirteen years of age. This, of course, gave Aristotle a position of great influence, which he used in various kindly ways, but without, it would seem, any particular advantage to himself. What probably drew him to the court was the chance of educating so great a prince in the principles of his Master, for Aristotle was a true Platonist in believing the Politics was the chief of all practical sciences, and that the great need in Politics was to educate our rulers. The bringing together of Aristotle and Alexander as teacher and pupil looks as if it had been arranged by some higher power to test the theory. The experiment did not work very well. One may doubt if it ever got a real chance to do so. The atmosphere of the court of Pella was vastly different from that of the Academy, and Aristotle must have found it hard to breathe freely. To say nothing of the king's domestic troubles, the policy of Philip was very much that of Frederick the Great. It was not a healthy air for any kind of idealism. What flourished instead was the dream of making Macedonia a world power by military conquest. The dream, as everyone knows, was realised by Alexander, whose mind even at the age of



thirteen it had probably begun to occupy. It has often been said that Aristotle did not grasp the new conception. Of course he did; the conception was, in fact, not very new, and he sometimes refers to it. He thought that, if the Greeks were to unite, they could probably conquer the Barbarians; which is what happened. But what Aristotle was interested in was civilisation. It could produce its finest flower only, he believed, in city states. The nation he regarded as a lower type of political organism. In this view he may have been right or wrong, but, holding it as he did, he was not likely to do much with Philip or even with Alexander. Soon after the death in 335-4 of the former, his real patron, he returned to Athens.

He determined to set up as an independent teacher. The place he chose for his "school" was a pleasant grove, the Lyceum, where under the trees he held discourse with his pupils, walking up and down, and so earning for his philosophy the name or nickname of Peripatetic. It is often stated that the Lyceum school was founded in opposition to the Academy; it would be just as true to say it was founded in imitation. The chief difference between the teaching of Plato and Aristotle was merely a difference of emphasis. The range of studies in the Academy appears to have been much the same as that in the Lyceum, and few minds have been more "encyclopædic" than Plato's. But we do not naturally think of Plato's mind as encyclopædic because he thought some other things of more importance than what are called "facts." To Aristotle, on the other hand, the "facts"—the conclusions we draw from observation of the physical universe—were of primary importance. He thought we could not have enough of them, and so it is natural to call his an encyclopædic mind. It is arguable that this change of emphasis makes all the difference, but it is equally true that in taking all knowledge to be his province Aristotle was a true child of the Academy.



On the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. a wave of anti-Macedonian feeling broke over Athens. In this wave Aristotle from his connection with the dead conqueror and his friendship with Antipater, the regent of Macedonia, was caught, and he found it advisable to leave the city which was his spiritual home in case he should share the fate of Socrates and Athens "sin a second time against philosophy." He withdrew to Chalcis, his mother's town, where in a year's time he died. His will has been preserved to us, and gives, what the wills of great men by no means always do, a favourable impression of the writer's consideration for others. He is said to have lisped in speech, and been something of a dandy—a bald man, with little eyes, but good features; walking on thin legs about his garden and unaffectedly laying down the law about everything.

### ARISTOTELIANISM

THE "Works of Aristotle" are extraordinary from every point of view: they are extraordinary for their matter, their manner, their influence. Consider first their range of subject. Aristotle treats of Logic, Rhetoric (the art of writing as well as speaking), Physics, Metaphysics, Biology, Psychology, Ethics, Politics, and many other subordinate or less extensive inquiries. Into each of them he introduced, often for the first time, system and order. There is no other man in human history who has done anything that is really comparable to this. The quality of his work is naturally unequal, but the work is there, a solid foundation on which the generations have builded. There is hardly a subject, apart from those discovered since his time, in which if you dig deep enough you will not come at last upon Aristotle.

And all this is set forth in a style, if style it can be



called, which would make an angel weep. It will not do simply to call him a bad writer and leave it at that. There is a surprising number of things in Aristotle which are as well said as they were worth saying. But they are sporadic and often merely parenthetical. For the most part he reads like a professor lecturing somewhat informally to advanced students and frequently getting into trouble with his sentences. This, in fact, is pretty much the truth of the case. It looks as if some almost too pious editor or editors had published after his death all Aristotle's manuscript they could find, including repetitions and restatements of former views. For a considerable part of his life he was an orthodox Platonist and wrote as such. It is natural to expect some traces of this period lingering even in works which belong to the time of his independent teaching. These traces have been found and ought not to cause any particular trouble. What does put a strain on the reader is the Aristotelian style. He is expected to know the arguments and ideas, and to be initiated in the terminology, not merely of the Lyceum, but also of the Academy. Consequently, he sometimes feels like a man trying to decode a cipher. Yet even this is less trying than Aristotle's way of interrupting himself. What may be called the "But it may be said" habit of mind is almost an obsession with him. With all that, he has a curious fascination for any intelligent reader. He is so pregnant, so full of matter, so wise, and so human that one does not wish him different. This feeling is deepened when we discover that his best nuggets are in his hardest rock. It may console us for the loss of works written for the "general reader," such as the lost Dialogues composed in imitation of Plato. Their style was admired by Cicero, who may be allowed to know something of the matter. We have got the *Constitution of Athens* written in what may be called a semi-popular manner; it is highly important for the historian, but as literature it is a jejune affair. Not that



Aristotle cannot be "readable" when he likes; he can, and frequently is. But as a literary artist he can never have been comparable with Plato. One may safely deny that Plato even in writing a lecture not meant for publication could have perpetrated the sentences of which his pupil is only too capable.

We should be all the more grateful to Fortune that it is the technical and not the popular writings of Aristotle which have come down to us. If it had been the other way, we should never have known what Aristotelianism was or how it differed from Platonism. As it is, while the broad differences are obvious, there is a great deal in Aristotle that is clearly Platonic, not always fully assimilated to the rest of his teaching.

Thus he began by accepting the Theory of Ideas and, as part of that Theory, the belief that the Ideas exist independently of the things, the sensible things, to which they "are present" or which "participate in" them, or however one might express the relation between things and their Ideas. Aristotle came to doubt, and at last to deny completely, the existence of any reality independent of what we call things. But he remained to the end Platonic on one point, the crucial point. Though things are real, no thing is wholly real; only part of it is real; the rest is appearance. This agreement is more fundamental than the difference between the two philosophers. But the difference is vital, too. While Aristotle believed that all reality must be contained within the physical universe, Plato thought that, if once a distinction were made between the real and the unreal or less real, this involved belief in a complete world of real essences beyond or beside the world of sense. For (the argument runs) if the world of sense depends for any reality it may have upon the world of Ideas, the Ideas must be independent of the things of sense. It is not at all clear from the Dialogues that Plato (or Socrates in Plato) did believe that the Ideas in fact existed inde-



pendently of phenomena. But this belief was a natural result of holding the doctrine of Ideas and (we may take it from Aristotle) a belief maintained, if not by Plato himself, by important members of the Academy.

However that may be, Aristotle preferred another way of stating the relation between the real and the unreal in things. He made a distinction between *form* and *matter*. It was one of the oldest conceptions in Greek philosophy that the world we see has been shaped into its present appearance out of some shapeless and unqualified stuff, which the Greeks called by a word translated in Latin writers by *materies*, whence our "matter." This conception Aristotle revived and filled with a new meaning. Any thing, any distinct object of sense, has, of course, a shape or form. But a form must be a form of something, and this something he calls "matter." Form cannot in ordinary conditions exist except in matter, while matter is only a possibility of becoming—whatever it will become when it has received form. Form is as necessary to matter as matter is to form. You can distinguish them in thought, but you never find them apart. Nor is there any use in looking for any reality outside things, which are always a combination of form and matter. Reality is in them or it is nowhere.

In other words, form and matter are relative terms. We should not therefore confine their use to the most elementary kind of form, whatever this may be, or the primal matter, whatever that may be. Thus in the case of a marble statue we can distinguish between the form, which is the shape of the statue, and its matter, which is marble. But marble itself is capable of analysis in the same way into the form and the matter of marble. This process we may carry as far as it will go. We reach the limit when we come to "the four elements," being earth, air, water, fire. Beyond them we cannot proceed, since they can be analysed only into hot and cold, dry and moist *plus* "prime matter,"



which might be called pure matter, and like pure form exists only in thought and cannot be perceived by the senses. We must, therefore, be careful when we come on the words "form" or "matter" in Aristotle to consider whether he is using them absolutely or with reference to a particular thing, such as a marble statue. In the former case, what he says applies to form and matter always; in the latter, to form and matter in a particular instance.

And he complicates the situation further by using a great deal the word *physis*, which we translate in a rather misleading way by "nature." Here is another conception which was a very old one in Greek philosophy and had played an enormous part in its development. As often happens in such cases, the conception itself had gradually changed, with the result that by Aristotle's time the word "nature" had become highly ambiguous. As he says, it was sometimes used to mean what he called "form" and sometimes to mean what he called "matter." The first usage he considered more philosophical. He does not on that account drop the other, but calmly continues to employ both. Why does Aristotle take these risks of being misunderstood? Partly because his students would understand, partly because he believed there was truth in the other usage too. Plato, it will be remembered, suggested that at the core of every genuine tradition was very likely a seed of truth which had been preserved from antediluvian times. What he offered as an hypothesis, Aristotle appears to have accepted as an historical fact. He attached high importance to all traditional lore. There must, he thought, be "something in it"; and if he found that it agreed substantially with the opinions of "wise men"—philosophers or men of exceptional ability—on any question, he did not think it necessary to go further. It only remained to express the result in terms of his own philosophy. This is why he often appears to be loose, casual, and even self-contradictory



in what he says. Everything goes into his sieve, and it is very confusing. But if you wait for the result of his shaking you do at last find at the bottom a residue which is tolerably clear and solid.

In respect of this word "nature," for instance, we have only to watch in what sense he is using it. Aristotle himself makes no bones about his own laxness, and has discussed the ambiguities of the word at some length. What, he asks, do we mean when we say of certain things that they exist "by nature"? We mean, in the first place, that they do not exist by art—that they are not manufactured objects. But, secondly, we mean that there is something within them which may start them moving, whereas any impulse to movement in manufactured objects must come from without. When we speak of "nature," then, we seem to be thinking of this innate impulse to movement in certain things—in all that body of things which in English we call Nature. For Aristotle himself this may be called his grand governing idea. It is a little like the idea of a "life-force," or the *élan vital* of Bergson. Only what interests Aristotle is not so much the movement itself as the goal to which it is moving. Now, what is the goal to which everything in Nature is moving? It can only be the form of the thing when the thing has reached its completion, which is the end of its movement. Therefore, says Aristotle, a thing is most properly said to have attained its "nature" when it has fully attained its "form." From this point of view, then, "form" and "nature" may be regarded as synonymous. At the same time we must recognise the fact that by the "nature" of a thing people often mean what it is made of—in fact, its "matter." Thus they will say that wood is the "nature" of a wooden bed. But this use of the word is open to criticism, since wood itself cannot be regarded as a simple or primary substance, and we have to ask ourselves what is the "nature" of wood. We come at last to the ele-



ments, and this gives us a third use, the usage by which we call the four elements "nature." These are three more or less technical meanings of the word, but they need not deter us—at least, they do not deter Aristotle—from using it in a colloquial or literary way, as when we say that Nature does nothing in vain, or Nature abhors a vacuum.

We need not further consider any but the specially Aristotelian use of "nature" as equivalent to "form." Words which denote the same thing may have very different connotations, and this is eminently true of "nature" and "form." The suggestions of "nature," it has been said, are dynamic; the suggestions of "form" are static. When we speak of the "form" of a thing, nothing is suggested but an aspect of the completed thing; when we speak of its "nature," a new suggestion comes in, the suggestion of the *process* by which the completed thing has come to be what it is. This is why the word "nature" is so valuable to Aristotle and so characteristic of him. It helps him to express what he felt to be a cardinal difference between Plato and himself. It is the difference between the mathematician and the biologist. It would, of course, be an error to suppose that Plato regarded the Ideas merely as a mathematician regards his numbers and diagrams; but that was one way in which the Ideas could be approached, and the mathematician in Plato was fond of it. Aristotle, on the other hand, was dominated by the conception of process—which, it is perhaps needless to add, is not the same thing as progress. His insistence on process was certainly of priceless value, and makes him really, for all his debt to Plato, a markedly original philosopher. He lives, as it were, in the same house with Plato, but he habitually looks out of a different window and sees a different landscape.

It was this biological quality of his thinking which led him to make another of his fundamental distinc-



tions, the distinction between the actual and the potential. If A is capable of becoming B, it is actually A but potentially B. An actual acorn is a potential oak. Is this a purely verbal distinction? Aristotle did not think so. No doubt an acorn is an acorn and an oak an oak, and neither can be anything but what it is. But, after all, an acorn and an oak have a very special relation to each other, and it is this which is expressed by saying that the former is potentially the latter. Another way of putting it is to say that you cannot really know what the acorn is until you know that it is capable of becoming an oak. In general terms the *end* explains the *process*, is, in a sense, the *cause* of the process. The actual is logically prior to the potential and is necessary to its existence. This is the same as saying that every process implies an end, which, as we saw, we may also call a "nature," and only realises itself and finds its meaning when it has attained this end or "nature."

That is why Aristotle has been called a teleologist. The description is accurate, if by a teleologist we mean a philosopher who believes that everything has an end towards which it is moving. It is not accurate if we mean something more than this. Something more is, in fact, commonly meant. There has come in the idea of a Creator who has designed a universe with a system of ends. Such an idea is quite foreign to Aristotle, for whom God is not the Creator, but simply a pure self-contemplating Intelligence. Nor must we credit him with the belief that the world is moving towards a better or a higher state. Completion is not the same thing as perfection, and all that Aristotle maintains is that we live in a system of things moving towards their completion.

We are now in a position to understand Aristotle's discussion of *causes*. The question is important because it is his view that a thing is known only through its causes. These are normally four in number: the



material, the formal, the efficient, the final cause. In other words, in order to know a thing, you must know (1) its matter, (2) its form, (3) the agent which makes it what it comes to be, (4) its end. None of these causes by itself is enough to cause the thing; in ordinary conditions all four are necessary. It is at first surprising to find matter and form considered as causes. But this is only another example of the perplexities produced by a gradual change in the meaning of a word since antiquity. The Greek word which we translate "cause" meant originally "that which is responsible" for something. In this sense form and matter are clearly causes, for they are necessary conditions of anything being what it is at all. Thus (to resume our illustration of the marble statue) we can see that the matter of the statue—marble—is a cause of it, since without the marble there could be no such statue. We can also see that the form of the statue is a cause, since a formless statue is not a statue at all. Again, the sculptor is a cause; that no one would deny. But the final cause? Well, the end of the statue, its completion, obviously conditions at every step the action of the other causes. It causes them to act in the way they do. The sculptor first thinks of a statue and then makes it. Therefore, although the other causes, and conspicuously the material cause—the marble—are prior in *time*, the completion of the statue is prior in *thought*. That is why the final cause is the most important of all.

Aristotle has much to say about the interrelations of the four causes. We must be content with observing that he makes a broad distinction between the "material" and the rest. On one side is the undetermined matter, on the other the form which determines it. The undetermined is the meaningless; so that the form of a thing may be said to give it meaning, may even be said to *be* its meaning (*logos*). The form explains the thing, says "what it was to be the thing"; that is, states its essence (*ousia*). This amounts to iden-



tifying the formal with the efficient and the final causes. The form of a thing is the way it is constructed, the end of a thing is the way it ought to be constructed; but, since a thing cannot be truly said to be *constructed* unless it is constructed as it ought to be, the formal cause may be identified with the final. Again, we may say that it is the conception of the right construction of a thing in the mind (*psyche*) of its maker which causes it. This is what we call the efficient cause. The form of the thing as it is: the formal cause. The form of the thing as it should be: the final cause. The form of the thing in the mind of the agent: the efficient cause. Important distinctions, but distinctions only. These three causes are fundamentally one.

It is necessary to grasp this somewhat intricate business before we can follow Aristotle's method in science. That must be left to the student himself. But it is now, perhaps, time to say something of what is generally called Aristotle's "classification of the sciences." Here, again, we must not be misled by a word. "Science" in Greek means simply "knowledge." It is "science" if you know mathematics, if you know a good man or a good argument from a bad, if you know how to play the flute. Since Aristotle deals with the whole of knowledge, he is naturally led to divide it into fields. Some of these had been divided off before him, though rarely with any clear distinction; some naturally divide themselves off. But to see how they all lay so as to form a whole is a widely different matter. It is probable that Aristotle's scheme owes much to the full curriculum of the Academy. Still, it is, so far as we can tell, the first comprehensive effort to organise the whole of knowledge. Of course, the actual sum of ascertained facts in his time was beyond computation less than it is now. Yet the audacity of the attempt remains. As for its success, one need only say that knowledge is still, in the main,



organised on Aristotle's lines. Any comment on that is clearly superfluous.

The main principle of his classification is this: Knowledge is of three sorts—theoretical, practical, productive. The theoretical sciences are those which seek only to know, the practical are those which seek to know how one ought to behave, the productive are those which seek to know how to make something useful or beautiful. Theoretical science is subdivided into Mathematics, Physics, and Metaphysics, which Aristotle calls "Theology" because the chief of the "forms" it studies is God. The practical sciences are Politics and Ethics, although, strictly speaking, Ethics is a branch of Politics. The productive are such as Rhetoric (the art of prose) and Poetic (the art of poetry). "Productive Science" is not a name that Aristotle affects, but something like it is necessary to make his scheme clear. The broad division is between theoretical and practical.

There is one of the sciences, however, which occupies a peculiar position. This is Logic. Briefly, Logic is the study of correct reasoning, and is, therefore, properly speaking, not a science at all, but a necessary preliminary to the study of any science. This is why the body of the Aristotelian treatises on Logic received the name of the *Organon*, or Tool, because Logic is the tool of which the student must possess himself before he sets to work upon any science. Aristotle attached the greatest importance to it, partly, perhaps, for the very human reason that systematic Logic was pretty much his own invention. Its importance has become to some extent merely historical, but this history is amazing. The mind of the great thirteenth century was nourished upon it, and to this day we argue in the technical terms of Aristotle. But the value of his Logic, even that division of it which is called Formal Logic, is very far from being exhausted. It raises questions which must always be fundamental. What is involved



when we make a statement about something or somebody? What is it to "prove" a thing? Aristotle's answers are not final; but, then, neither are ours. What he did was to make the questions precise, and if he had done nothing else it would still make him remarkable.

We can hardly concern ourselves here with what he meant by his *Categories*. But it is obviously worth noting that his examination of statements or propositions involves what confronted our childhood as the "analysis of sentences," and so led directly to the science of grammar, which, before Aristotle, could hardly be said to exist. He is also entitled to be called the true inventor of the "syllogism," the type of the logical argument from "premisses" to a "conclusion." *All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore Socrates is mortal.* That is one form or "figure" of the syllogism. Aristotle was justly proud of his invention; for, indeed, what could be, in the mathematical sense, more elegant? It has been attacked on the ground that, if we know the premisses, we already know the conclusion. If we know that all men are mortal and that Socrates is a man, we have already discovered that Socrates is mortal. Why, then, does Aristotle, who knows all about "begging the question," put forward such an argument? The answer is interesting. His *Logic* is an attempt to systematise and generalise the only kind of strict reasoning which existed before his effort—the reasoning employed by geometers. Euclid, who inherited the method from his predecessors, is constantly proving universal truths from a single instance. From the consideration of *one* triangle he can prove that the sum of the interior angles of *all* triangles is equal to two right angles. In the same way, Aristotle would maintain, you do not need to ascertain the mortality of every single man before you can say, "All men are mortal"; you could say it without knowing Socrates at all. Again, in order to know that Socrates is mortal, you do not need to



know all that is implied by mortality; it is enough to know that he has certain attributes which necessarily involve mortality.

In any case, the syllogism is something more than a bare process of inference. The conclusion is almost a secondary matter. A syllogism is the bringing together of premisses so that the obvious conclusion follows. If we are disposed to think that Aristotle attaches too much weight to a sort of verbal diagram in his method, it is only fair to remember that it is a matter of the last importance to get one's premisses correctly stated. Pedantry here is almost a virtue. Take care of the premisses and the conclusion will take care of itself.

The syllogism is a method of *deduction*—that is, of arguing from the universal to the particular. But Aristotle is also aware of *induction*, which is arguing from the particular to the universal, as when one argues from one's necessarily limited experience that all General buses are painted red. It would seem that induction is the exact opposite of deduction, and in an obvious sense that is true. But in a deeper sense induction is only a form of deduction, although a somewhat peculiar form. What happens, according to Aristotle, is this: We see a number of instances of a universal truth, and from these immediately infer that truth. A child does not need to play with many toy balloons before concluding that all toy balloons are easily burst. But is this really deduction? Only by a stretching and, perhaps, abuse of the term. All we can say is that the child, after a sufficient experience, suddenly "just knows" that all balloons are easy to burst. In this he resembles the greatest scientific genius. It is one of the marks of scientific genius to see "in a flash" that what is true of some individuals in a class is true of the whole class. Aristotle fully recognised this, and to recognise the importance of that kind of guessing which we call scientific imagination is a greater thing than giving it its right name—whatever that may be.



There is another point to be observed. It is possible for a syllogism to be correct in form and yet false in fact. Science, however, deals only with syllogisms that are true in fact. Now, how can we be certain that our premisses are not merely correctly stated but true? The natural answer is: By having first proved them true. But clearly that process cannot go on for ever. We must come at last to certain things which have nothing beyond them from which they can be inferred. And yet we must and do assume these things to be true. We assume, for instance, that, if a thing exists, it cannot at the same time not exist. We cannot prove that; but, if it is false, then we cannot get to know anything at all, or even proceed any further with our thinking. Besides such axioms, which are of universal application, there are the axioms peculiar to each science. "Two straight lines cannot enclose a space" is an axiom peculiar to geometry, or at any rate to Euclidean geometry. If you do not grant him this, Euclid can do nothing. There are also his "definitions," which you must accept before he can proceed a step. You must also, of course, accept as real objects of thought the lines and circles and triangles about which he discourses. Every science makes similar assumptions except metaphysics, which professes to make no assumptions except those which are necessary to all thinking whatever.

✓ These axioms and primary assumptions of science, which we cannot prove, nevertheless seem truer to us than any demonstrated conclusion. How is this? Aristotle explains that it is because they are grasped by what we may call intuition—an intuitive act, that is, of the *reason*. In such an act the mind is exercising a higher faculty than that which is exercised in the discovery of scientific truth. A higher but not an alien faculty; for Aristotle does not think of the mental faculties as existing side by side in the mind of man like things in a country grocer's window. He very



carefully, and in greater detail than can be fairly summarised here, traces from its rudiments in sense perception the growth of the power to grasp the universal in the particular until we can grasp those ultimate universals of each science, and, after these, the universals of all knowledge whatsoever.

Armed with this instrument of Logic, Aristotle investigates the whole learning of his time.

His work in Biology may be mentioned first because it is so characteristic. There is an interesting passage in which he defends the study of animal life against those who thought it beneath their attention. If Aristotle had been better aided in the collection of materials there is no saying what he would have done for Biology. As a matter of fact he knew only some five hundred different animals, and even about these his information is often ludicrously wrong. After that it seems preposterous to call him the greatest of biologists. Yet in historical perspective he seems to be so. The science is for all intents and purposes his creation, and the disciple, even if he be Darwin, is not greater than the master. Aristotle, as might be expected, is greatest in the theory of the subject; but he is also a first-rate observer. Of course, we do not know how far he was dependent on the observation of others, but this hardly matters, since the whole business was organised by himself. One of his methods was dissection, another the use of diagrams. The results are sometimes so brilliant that recent research has been able to add very little of importance to them, and has sometimes actually justified them against modern criticism. Where Aristotle goes wildly wrong is when he accepts "travelers' tales" about animals beyond his reach, such as the tiger—he is incredible on the tiger. But no one ought to suppose that he was as sure of the information he found in romantic history books as of the information he could personally control. He merely



thought it right to put down all the evidence he could discover in case he should leave out something, which for all its apparent absurdity might turn out to be true. In this he was clearly right. It is a common and largely justified criticism of Greek science that it was too prone to speculate from incomplete evidence. Aristotle, at any rate, always collects all the evidence he can. He despises no source. Like Darwin, he was always ready to listen to the practical expert, however "uneducated." The imagination finds pleasure in the picture of Aristotle listening to Ægean fishers while, with many gestures, they explain in their island dialect the habits of crabs and cuttlefishes.

Still, this has what scientists are apt to call "only" an historical interest. The application of the Aristotelian philosophy to the subject has more than that. One result of it was classification according to genus and species, the first step in the direction of making Biology a true science. Take a particular animal, say, your cat Tiberius. You can distinguish him from other cats by characteristics which belong to him alone, such as the way his colours are blended or the hairiness of his ears, but which are not necessary to him if he is to be merely a cat. It is the animal which possesses these necessary characteristics (called in Latin, *differentiæ*) that is what we mean by "a cat." But if we extend our observations we shall see that there are other animals which have many or some of the *differentiæ* of cats. If they had them all, they would, of course, be cats; not having them all, they are only cat-like creatures (*felidæ*—from *feles*, a cat), which have some fundamental characteristics in common with the cats. The *felidæ* again may be included in some wider division of animals, such as the mammals. Thus you may classify Tiberius as belonging to the *species* cat, which species in turn belongs to the *genus* of *felidæ*, a genus of the mammals. At the same time Aristotle has a grounded distrust of hard and fast classification. There



are no hard and fast divisions in Nature herself, and therefore any system of classification we may invent exists merely for our convenience. That there *are* genera and species Aristotle is convinced, but how best to distinguish between them is a matter for debate. Accordingly, we find him classifying an animal now on one system and now on another. It is all right, he thinks, so long as we grasp the point that it must belong to *some* species and genus.

The importance of this is greater for Aristotle than for a biologist who believes in the evolution of one species from another. The Darwinian is more interested in the evolutionary process itself than in determining the species to which an individual plant or animal belongs. Aristotle for his part did not believe in evolution. He was perfectly familiar with the theory, which had been held more than a century before his time. But it looked as if the theory had broken down for want of evidence. The evidence must nearly all be drawn from sciences like comparative anatomy and palæontology and geology, which can hardly be said to have existed in his time. Over and above this it was his deepest conviction that each thing has its own end towards which it is moving; its own end and not another's; and therefore every species must be eternal and immutable.

✓ This view leads Aristotle to regard as of transcendent importance the problem of reproduction. If a species is to maintain itself unchanged, it must contain within it, transmitted from parent to offspring, an unchanging and immortal principle. What he says on this subject is not easy for the layman to understand, but the biologists seem agreed that nowhere is he more profound and subtle. There is even something like a movement, not exactly "back to Aristotle," but towards adapting him to Darwin. It has been felt that Darwin, while proving the fact of evolution and offering an explanation of it, did not consider a still more



fundamental problem, the mystery of life itself. He was quite right, of course, to stick to his last, but, after all, no theory of evolution can be entirely satisfactory which omits from discussion what it is that evolves. Aristotle felt this and began with the "vital force" or the "will to live," or whatever you call that which makes a flower or a beast *want* to survive. What, he asked himself, does it want to survive *for*? It must have some conscious or unconscious *end*—and so he was led to his teleology.

Whatever its value, this way of looking at the world did give him an insight which no other man has rivalled into what is meant by an organism. No doubt science can now improve considerably upon Aristotle's definition of an organism. That is not the point. The point is that no other philosopher has had so full a sense of organic life pulsing through the universe of thought and being. He often uses what we call abstract and technical language. But you will find that he never talks about abstractions except to deny their reality. This indeed is true of Plato also, who was led to his conception of an Ideal world, not because he found this world too real and substantial, but because he did not find it real and substantial enough. Aristotle's real world is a whole composed of unnumbered living elements—an organisation of organisms. That is never out of his mind, and the thought of it unifies all his thinking.

✓ After the body, the soul. First, we must ask ourselves what Aristotle meant by "the soul." It is necessary to ask this question not merely because Christianity has given a new meaning to the word, but also because its meaning was by no means fixed among the Greeks themselves. In Homer *psyche* is something that exists in a man while he is alive, and goes out of him and becomes his ghost when he dies. It is, in a sense, the man's life, but Homer's thought is not capable of the abstraction necessary to grasp the notion



of a life that is not merely a sort of airy replica of the body. Later, as reflection grew less naïve, *psyche* came to mean something much more (or less) than a ghost; it was that in a man whereby he is akin to the gods, his "soul" almost in the modern sense, the immortal part of him, the chief seat of the instinctive and the subconscious. This later view was historically the revival of a doctrine much older than Homer, but it was the doctrine a good deal refined and intellectualised. This was largely the work of the Pythagorean philosophers, a work continued by Socrates and Plato. In them we pass clearly from the psychic to the psychological; in fact, the governing principle in the Platonic *psyche* is pure thought. Soul has become almost "mind." Aristotle starts from that.

He could not, however, start wholly uninfluenced by traditional and current usage. Now, the average unphilosophical Greek thought rather of souls than of "soul." Every living thing had for him a soul in it, and that its own soul and no other thing's. Aristotle considers this point of view, and allows an element of reasonableness in it: there is a sense in which it is permissible and perhaps necessary to speak of souls. At the same time there is plainly something common to all souls, and we must try to find a definition of that. In view of this we may divide the human soul into three: the nutritive, the sensitive, the rational soul. The terms largely explain themselves. The nutritive soul concerns itself with nutrition and procreation, and is possessed by all living things whatever; the sensitive soul is concerned with perception and analogous processes, and is confined to animals; the rational soul is roughly what we call the reason, and is confined to man.

✓ Aristotle makes it clear that he does not regard these as distinct and independent parts of the soul. They are rather faculties which must work together or not at all. Soul itself, he proceeds to argue, is one with body.



You may, of course, by killing a man, separate *his* soul from *his* body, but that is not the point. You have merely severed a temporary union. What you cannot do is to separate body and soul in *thought* any more than you can separate matter and form in thought. It follows from this that Aristotle does not believe in what is called personal immortality. Soul is immortal, but not your personal soul or mine. The only exception—and it is hardly an exception—is God, whom he regards as an entirely reasonable soul. The human soul has not yet quite got to that condition, and if it had, it would cease to be human. Still, Aristotle does sometimes speak of human reason as a part of the soul which is separable from the body. If God is a soul existing independently of body, then the human soul, so far as it is like God—that is, so far as it is reasonable—must be capable of a like independence. A puzzling argument.

As regards the three faculties or souls within the soul, they need not detain us long. The nutritive soul is simply what makes every living thing seek to feed itself and reproduce its kind. Aristotle observes that the one activity implies the other, Nature caring more for the race than the individual. The sensitive soul is naturally more complex. What is sensation or perception? Aristotle's predecessors had generally taken the view that it is a purely physical experience. (The view of Plato is more subtle.) Aristotle denies this entirely, but hardly escapes from it entirely. He is still influenced by the way the problem had first been stated. The question had been whether perception (conceived as physical) was the perception of "like by like" or of "unlike by unlike." Aristotle replies that it is neither; it is the assimilation of unlike to like. (So we talk of "assimilating" food.) But what is it in perception that is assimilated? It is the organ of sense. Thus, when we see a red rose our eyes are reddened. Even if this be true, it is a purely physical event, and Aristotle



has not yet begun to explain what happens to the *soul* when the rose is seen. Yet he insists that perception is purely an act of the soul.

Of perception is born imagination; it is the lingering in the soul of perception after the object perceived is gone. The importance of imagination for him consists in this, that without it we cannot have mental images, and therefore cannot have memory. Of course, to remember a thing is not the same as remembering the image of the thing, but the image, in Platonic language, "reminds" us of the thing. And Aristotle makes a distinction between "memory" and "recollection," the point of which may be expressed in modern terminology thus: Memory may be "subconscious"; recollection is bringing "above the threshold of consciousness." But in all this, it is very necessary to be careful not to suppose that, while images are required for thinking, thoughts themselves are only images.

When he comes to the highest faculty of the soul, what we should generally call reason, he makes another of his distinctions. There is, he says, an "active" and a "passive" reason. Apparently he is certain that there must be a distinction in the mind answering to that which he makes between the efficient and the material cause of a thing. We say of a bronze lamp that the bronze is its matter or material cause, and that the artist (or the artist's thought guiding his hand) is its efficient cause, making the bronze into a lamp. Just so, Aristotle believes, the passive is acted upon by the active reason. You may express this by saying that the active raises the passive reason from the potential to the actual. Is metaphysics to be permitted thus to invade psychology? Questions, in their nature perhaps insoluble, at once suggest themselves. Is *passive* reason in any sense *reason* at all? As for the active reason, we can make out that the more it prevails in a man, the nearer, according to Aristotle, he



comes to achieving the end of his being, the more he becomes man. But Aristotle will also have it that God is nothing but Active Reason. Are we, then, to say of a man that the more he resembles God the more he becomes truly man? This question the mystic would no doubt answer in an eager affirmative. But how could Aristotle do that, for whom man is an animal, and can never achieve his end by ceasing to be an animal and becoming a soul like God? No doubt he had his own answer to the question. He has not told us what it is.

Man, at any rate, is an animal. What kind of animal? Here at least the answer is known: man is a *political* animal. The treatise which we call the *Politics* deals with him as such. It is a perplexing book to discuss, because it has evidently been put together from various essays or studies, composed at different times, and pursuing different lines of inquiry. But even this is a minor difficulty compared with the fact that there appears within the book itself a complete change of method and attitude. The cause and nature of the change are plain enough. Plato, completely disillusioned about the world of politics as he knew it, and convinced that only the philosopher could set it right, went on patiently constructing models of scientific government. There is in the *Politics* a good deal of such Utopian thought—discussions of the ideal state, and so on—which is altogether in the vein, though without the imaginative excitement of Plato. Then comes the break. It appears that Aristotle suffered a revulsion from orthodox Platonism, which affected his thinking on political as well as other subjects. It was natural enough. Plato, tired of practical politics, turned to the ideal state; Aristotle, tired of ideal states, turned to practical politics. The rest of his book is concerned with the practice of states as he found them. The result is that the *Politics* is one of the most confused and untidy compilations ever attributed to a systematic thinker.



The quality is as uneven as the form. In truth, the *Politics*, taken as a whole, is disappointing—that is, disappointing from Aristotle. The fact is, he was not politically minded. Plato was, and it makes all the difference. It is possible to agree with much of Aristotle's criticism of an imagined polity like that of the *Republic* and yet feel that Plato knew of what he was speaking in a way that Aristotle did not. It is just because he understood political human nature so well that Plato makes his daring proposals; Aristotle reveals none of that intimacy. Where the latter was truly admirable was in the collection and arrangement of the material for the subject. To help him he described, or caused to be described, the constitutions of some 158 states. One of these descriptions, no doubt the longest, survives under the title of *The Polity of the Athenians*. It is invaluable to the constitutional historian, whose special science it may be said to have founded. But set it beside Thucydides and it appears an uncritical handbook devoid of historical insight or imagination. Aristotle, like so many ancient writers, is strangely deficient in the historic sense. Plato certainly possessed it, although the extent to which he possessed it may be debated. The proof lies partly in the power with which the more dramatic of the Dialogues are thrown into the past without many, or perhaps any, anachronisms, and partly in his attitude to tradition, which he considers has a true meaning in it, although he will not answer for the details. The attitude of Aristotle lacks this subtlety.

The greatness of the *Politics*—for with all its deficiencies it is one of the landmarks in the vast realm of political science—consists in two very Aristotelian things: its grasp of first principles and its respect for facts. The man would not be human if he did not betray some trace of bias, but no writer of eminence in this subject reveals more of the scientific spirit, supposed by some to be a purely modern virtue. To get



the best out of him we have no doubt to make considerable adjustments of his thought to present conditions. We have to do with the change from the *polis* to the nation state. Thus, when Aristotle calls man "a political animal," he means an animal living in a *polis*; and when he says "'by nature' a political animal," he means that it is only in a *polis* that man achieves his "nature" or final end. Such a view at once challenges all our modern assumptions. A mode of defence has been suggested for Aristotle. He could not, it has been argued, foresee the collapse of the *polis* before the advance of the nation, and therefore cannot be blamed for preferring the former to the latter. It is very doubtful if Aristotle would have availed himself of this line of retreat. He was perfectly familiar with the idea of the nation as state. His life covered the very period when the old cities were trampled down by Macedonia. Aristotle did not see what that had got to do with the question. His problem was to find the sort of community in which human life flowered to its best. He found it in the city state, not in the nation, which he considered a rudimentary organism by comparison. And if we take his own test—the quality of the human product in either system—we might find him a little obstinate in the matter still.

Whatever side the student of politics may take, he will no doubt admit that the *polis* has an unrivalled value for the purpose of study. For there he finds all his problems on a small scale but in concentrated form, finds them luminously distinct and rapidly developing, instead of losing himself, as he sometimes must, in the vast obscure movements of modern democracies. He will also admit that the philosophy of politics is not dependent on forms and methods of government. Here Aristotle has had something to teach all his successors. He lays it down that nature has implanted in the human animal two needs or instincts: the instinct of sex and the instinct to command or (as it may happen)



to obey. The first explains itself; the second is worth thinking over. Aristotle believed that some races of men were born to be the servants of others. He also believed that the woman was born to obey the man. This, of course, was reactionary even in Aristotle's day, and flat against the teaching of the Academy. It may be supposed his feeling was that, while human beings might be drawn together by the chemistry of the blood, it took something more than that to keep them together. The permanence of the first societies—that, he felt, was the hard thing to explain, and the explanation he offered was that the woman and the slave at heart *want* to be governed. At any rate, it is in this way, he thinks, that the earliest—which to him means also the simplest—form of society comes into existence; being what he calls the "household" or "family." It reminds one of what naturalists tell us about the gorilla. Darwin, who thought of this parallel, would evidently have accepted Aristotle's theory concerning the origin of human society as reasonably adequate. He would not, of course, have concerned himself with the further development of the theory, which was to this effect: In time, kindred families settle together in a "village," and the village, in suitable circumstances, joins with other villages to become a *polis*.

The objection at once suggests itself that this is really too base and mechanical an explanation. But Aristotle has a complete answer to that. He puts it in this way: The *polis* comes into existence with a view to living, but exists with a view to living *well*. That is to say, human life to be really human must be lived in society, for a perfectly solitary man would be "a god or a beast." It is this necessity which creates society, but society does not exist merely to satisfy this necessity. On the contrary, it exists to enable man to reach his end or "nature," to be the *good* man; and that is its true justification. If anything, Aristotle lays himself open to the charge of setting too high rather than too low



a value on the moral and intellectual disciplines of the state. By the state is meant the *polis*, a city of reasonable size, not too large for all the male citizens to meet in one place and transact public business. That was the old Hellenic system, and Aristotle clings to it as Plato had clung to it. He must have seemed to some contemporary thinkers obstinately and unimaginatively conservative. The idea of cosmopolitanism was already abroad. So was a somewhat older idea that the state exists not "by nature" but "by law"; in other words, that it is the creation of human legislators and that consequently its claim upon our loyalty is to be measured only by its convenience. Aristotle rejects both these views.

On the other hand, as we saw, he will not go with Plato the whole way. Utopias fill him with doubt. The state, described in the *Republic*, where every citizen becomes, in Burke's phrase, "a public creature," would, he thinks, be no longer a state but an individual. It would be like a beehive. So Aristotle, perhaps too complacently, falls back on the institutions which, for all their recently incurred discredit, had, after all, worked so brilliantly in the past. His general position is this: To make any solid progress we must take things as we find them and work from that, even if among these things are slavery and the subjection of women. It is easy to condemn, as it is easy to misrepresent, this position. But one sees why it is to Plato that political idealists have always turned.

From the state Aristotle passes to the individual. Ethics, he says, is a branch of Politics. This is also assumed by Plato. It sounds paradoxical until one has grasped what the Greeks understood by "virtue." The "virtue" of a sword is what makes it a good *sword*; the "virtue" of a flute what makes it a good *flute*. So the "virtue" of a man is what makes him a good *man*. We prefer to say that virtue is what makes a man *good*. It is only a difference of emphasis, but in



morals a difference of emphasis makes all the difference. Since, in Aristotle's words, the state exists in order that men may "live well," the statesman is presented with a moral problem. It is his business so to legislate and administer as to provide the "political animals" under his government with the best opportunity of realising their "nature." In a word, ethics is part of his science. Observe that this does not mean the subservience of morality to politics; it really means that politics is a moral business. Nor does it mean that men can be made better by act of parliament; it really means that acts of parliament should make it easier for men to make themselves better. From the point of view of the citizen the state is an opportunity for virtue.

What, then, is human virtue? It is, in Aristotelian phrase, the condition of the man who has attained his end. And what is the end of human life? It is, by general agreement, *Eudaimonia*—that is (as nearly as we can translate the word), Happiness; only when you ask people in what Happiness consists, they return very different answers. Aristotle's own answer would be that it is the effortless, and therefore pleasurable, exercise of all the faculties in their fullest development; for only then has a man achieved his end. Does this mean that only the perfect man has virtue? Strictly speaking, it does; Aristotle will not compromise (although he has been accused of doing it) on a moral principle. But no one is more sharply aware that the trouble in practice is the right application of the principle to any given set of conditions. To deny the possession of virtue in some degree to the man who makes the best application of the principle he can is like denying that the rose in your garden is a rose because it is not all a rose might be.

When Aristotle calls virtue a "condition" of the soul, the word he uses is a medical term which was properly applied to a condition or "habit" of the



body. This is an almost startling evidence of the biological turn we find in all his thinking. Virtue is the health of the soul. It will help us to understand this if we know how ancient medical theory regarded health of the body. Bodily health, it was maintained, depends upon the "harmony" or balance of contending opposites, these being the so-called "humours" of the body, any one of which was always ready to aggrandise itself at the expense of the rest, so as to make a man "sanguine" or "phlegmatic," or as it might be. We may see from this how Aristotle was led to his famous doctrine of the Mean. Virtue, he says, aims at the mean between extremes. It is, of course, preposterous to criticise him as if he had said that there was a danger of being too virtuous. A man cannot be too virtuous any more than he can be too healthy. A man cannot steer too well between Scylla and Charybdis.

Take courage. It is not an unreasonable thing to say that courage comes somewhere between cowardice and foolhardiness. But this does not mean that the courageous man is courageous just because he is a little afraid. Such a view might be defended, but it is not the view of Aristotle. His brave man has no fear at all; bravery has become a condition of his soul, a second nature with him. He reacts to each danger with the exact amount of emotion necessary to preserve the "harmony" of his nature, not reacting too much like the coward, or too little like the foolhardy man. This is not mixing one part of cowardice with two parts of rashness or anything of that sort. It is something different in *kind* from both. As with cowardice, so with the other moral excellences. Virtue approaches its material in a totally different way from vice. It is not the victory of one part of our nature over another—that is vice—but the due subordination of each part to the whole, by which means, and no other, one obtains what we might call the maximum of moral efficiency.

After the Christian moralists with their proclama-



tion of a war between the spirit and the flesh, even after Plato, the language held by Aristotle on the subject of virtue strikes us at first as tame and cold-blooded. This feeling is strengthened when we read his description of the *megalopsychos*, the typically great and good man, a gentleman who is said to "know his own value, which is high." The average reader rather wants to kick the *megalopsychos*. But let the average reader sit down and give us his own idea of the "perfect gentleman," and see if he does not want to kick his own creation too. It is one of the things that show Plato's genius for literature that he never attempts such a thing. Socrates is his hero, but a hero kept human by his humour and his irony. Aristotle would have been more interesting and illuminating if he had told us what historical characters he most admired. What he did *not* admire were cranks and zealots. Plato, who was by way of being a saint with a touch of the dogmatism and cantankerousness not unknown among the saints, would have had more sympathy with the enthusiasts. But if Aristotle pitches his note too low, we may at least say that there is nothing fundamentally ignoble in his conviction that the best human type is not produced by calling one part of our nature good and the other bad, and seeking to destroy the bad. It is all good, if we manage it on a good principle.

Now, the principle can be learned. It is this that makes moral progress possible. Here is genuine Greek doctrine; you must learn to be good. In morals this means learning good habits. It is the power of forming habits which distinguishes the animate from the inanimate—"you cannot teach a stone to fall upwards." The business of the moralist is to see that the habits formed by the animal man are good. This is why education is so important. The end of education, says Aristotle, quoting Plato, is to teach people how "to take pleasure in the right things"—a wonderful



saying. If you ask what "the right things" are, Aristotle replies that they are the things approved by the "practically wise" man—that is, in effect, the good statesman. And what the statesman approves is what makes the good citizen, out of whom is made the good man, a higher being. For Aristotle insists that above the "practical wisdom," which is the special virtue of the citizen and the statesman, there is the "theoretical wisdom," which is concerned with the things of the mind. It was teaching of this kind which recommended Aristotle to Christian thinkers, although not merely he, but all the finer spirits of antiquity unhesitatingly put the contemplative above the practical life. Where the Greeks did differ from much Christian doctrine or practice was in refusing to separate the two. They believed that practical wisdom is futile unless directed by knowledge or "theory"; while, on the other hand, that activity of the pure reason, which is what Aristotle means by "theory," is impossible in the absence of practical wisdom.

But first we must learn citizenship. In any decent constitution the chief instrument of government is persuasion and not force. The art of persuading his fellows is of the highest importance for the statesman. In the ancient city and state, where everyone lived a public life, it was important for everyone. "The art of persuasion" is the Greek definition of *rhetoric*. Such a definition shows at once that to the Greeks rhetoric meant something a good deal different from what it means to us, who use it almost as a term of abuse. For them it meant chiefly the effective presentation of a case, and ancient rhetoric at its best regards as its worst enemies empty, over-emphatic verbosity and irrelevant "flowers of speech." Its great virtue is clearness, the primary virtue of all style. Aristotle, who has left a considerable treatise on the subject, adds the point that the effective presentation of a case depends not merely on clearness of statement, but on clearness



of reasoning, which is by no means the same thing. He also derides appeals to the emotions extraneous to the argument, worked up pathos, and the like—in fact, the modern rhetorician's whole bag of tricks—and says that the emotion of the listener must derive from the truth of what the orator says. The *Rhetoric* is not much read in days when oratory is little studied as an art, and it is (for Aristotle) a somewhat rambling and uninspired book. For all that, it is full of good reading and good sense. Its importance to the literary historian is capital, for it became the standard treatise, expanded but never superseded by later writers, on what we may fairly call prose style.

As a sort of appendix to the *Rhetoric* is a tiny, mutilated treatise on the art of poetry, which some of us think valuable beyond estimate. It is not so much written as jotted down in Aristotle's most exasperating manner, and the labour of generations of scholars (rather hindered, one fears, than helped in this case by the speculations of philosophers) can hardly even yet be said to have got at its whole meaning. But scholarship has at least made it certain that the *Poetics* contains no transcendental moonshine about "poetry," but is practical to the point of laying its author open to the charge (unfair, of course) that he had no feeling for poetical beauty at all. Thus when he says that poetry is "imitation," some make sounds of deprecation, while others explain the dreadful word away. But Aristotle meant what he said. He would even have wondered what he had said wrong, for Plato had called poetry "imitation" before him, and most Greeks probably agreed. Yet it will be allowed that the Greeks knew something about the art of poetry. The truth is, of course, that one does not really understand a word until one knows its associations. The word "imitation" has ugly associations for us, but had interesting and even beautiful associations for the Greeks. Their art is to an astonishing degree imitative, the same



themes and patterns recurring over and over again; yet one never thinks of that; one thinks only of its profound originality. This is because to the Greeks imitation did not mean copying or reproducing, but making the object of your art your own. Here religion, the mother of the arts, helps us to understand. As the central act in any old Greek ritual of any elaboration, we normally find a choric dance, and this dance is normally mimetic, or, as we should now say, dramatic. The dancers then "imitate." What is it they imitate? Some action or passion of their god; and as they danced they felt themselves in some way and to some degree become one with him. This feeling helps us to see what Aristotle means when he says of tragedy that its effect is by means of pity and terror to purge the hearer of emotions like these. In the battle of life the weakening things are timidity and self-pity. In the tragic theatre one sees terrible and piteous things befall some man or woman notably better and greater than oneself. Helped by the poet and helping him—for in the greatest poetry of the Greeks the poet counts on the co-operation of his audience, counts on them to understand the tragic irony of the situation—we as well as he "imitate" the hero, go out of ourselves, and, so far as imagination will carry us, enter into him and become him. In this way we get rid of that excess of emotion which is dangerous to the health of the soul just as the excess of some "humour" is dangerous to the body. It seems that Aristotle's theory of the function of tragedy was suggested by medical theory, which prescribed dancing as a cure for certain extreme cases of nervous instability. As it was suggested by medical theory, so it may be confirmed by it, for it appears to anticipate some modern views of the subconscious. The poet, however, is not a doctor; it is his art that matters. And here Aristotle is firm. Poetry is not in any direct sense "self-expression." On the contrary, the poet "imitates" something; loses



himself in his subject. His æsthetic teaching comes to this: In the kingdom of art to lose one's soul is to find it.

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